

contact. The party or parties might constitute a list of alternative clearinghouse providers for the traveling object from which the user selects his desired contact).

5 As mentioned above, traveling objects enable objects 300 to be distributed "Out-Of-Channel;" that is, the object may be distributed by an unauthorized or not explicitly authorized individual to another individual. "Out of channel" includes paths of distribution that allow, for example, a user to directly redistribute an object to another individual. For example, an object provider might allow users to redistribute copies of an object to their friends and associates (for example by physical delivery of storage media or by delivery over a computer network) such that if a friend or associate satisfies any certain criteria required for use of said object, he may do so.

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For example, if a software program was distributed as a traveling object, a user of the program who wished to supply it or a usable copy of it to a friend would normally be free to do so.

20 Traveling Objects have great potential commercial significance, since useful content could be primarily distributed by users and through bulletin boards, which would require little or no

distribution overhead apart from registration with the "original" content provider and/or clearinghouse.

The "out of channel" distribution may also allow the
5 provider to receive payment for usage and/or otherwise maintain at least a degree of control over the redistributed object. Such certain criteria might involve, for example, the registered presence at a user's VDE node of an authorized third party financial relationship, such as a credit card, along with sufficient
10 available credit for said usage.

Thus, if the user had a VDE node, the user might be able to use the traveling object if he had an appropriate, available budget available on his VDE node (and if necessary, allocated to him), and/or if he or his VDE node belonged to a specially authorized group of users or installations and/or if the traveling
15 object carried its own budget(s).

Since the content of the traveling object is encrypted, it can
20 be used only under authorized circumstances unless the traveling object private header key used with the object is broken—a potentially easier task with a traveling object as compared to, for

example, permissions and/or budget information since many objects may share the same key, giving a cryptoanalyst both more information in ciphertext to analyze and a greater incentive to perform cryptoanalysis.

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In the case of a "traveling object," content owners may distribute information with some or all of the key blocks 810 included in the object 300 in which the content is encapsulated. Putting keys in distributed objects 300 increases the exposure to attempts to defeat security mechanisms by breaking or cryptoanalyzing the encryption algorithm with which the private header is protected (e.g., by determining the key for the header's encryption). This breaking of security would normally require considerable skill and time, but if broken, the algorithm and key could be published so as to allow large numbers of individuals who possess objects that are protected with the same key(s) and algorithm(s) to illegally use protected information. As a result, placing keys in distributed objects 300 may be limited to content that is either "time sensitive" (has reduced value after the passage of a certain period of time), or which is somewhat limited in value, or where the commercial value of placing keys in objects (for example convenience to end-users, lower cost of eliminating

the telecommunication or other means for delivering keys and/or permissions information and/or the ability to supporting objects going "out-of-channel") exceeds the cost of vulnerability to sophisticated hackers. As mentioned elsewhere, the security of
5 keys may be improved by employing convolution techniques to avoid storing "true" keys in a traveling object, although in most cases using a shared secret provided to most or all VDE nodes by a VDE administrator as an input rather than site ID and/or time in order to allow objects to remain independent of these values.

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As shown in Figure 19 and discussed above, a traveling object contains a permissions record 808 that preferably provides at least some budget (one, the other, or both, in a general case). Permission records 808 can, as discussed above, contain a key block(s) 810 storing important key information. PERC 808 may also contain or refer to budgets containing potentially valuable quantities/values. Such budgets may be stored within a traveling object itself, or they may be delivered separately and protected by highly secure communications keys and administrative object
15 keys and management database techniques.
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The methods 1000 contained by a traveling object will typically include an installation procedure for "self registering" the object using the permission records 808 in the object (e.g., a REGISTER method). This may be especially useful for objects
5 that have time limited value, objects (or properties) for which the end user is either not charged or is charged only a nominal fee (e.g., objects for which advertisers and/or information publishers are charged based on the number of end users who actually access published information), and objects that require widely available budgets and may particularly benefit from
10 out-of-channel distribution (e.g., credit card derived budgets for objects containing properties such as movies, software programs, games, etc.). Such traveling objects may be supplied with or without contained budget UDEs.

15 One use of traveling objects is the publishing of software, where the contained permission record(s) may allow potential customers to use the software in a demonstration mode, and possibly to use the full program features for a limited time before
20 having to pay a license fee, or before having to pay more than an initial trial fee. For example, using a time based billing method and budget records with a small pre-installed time budget to

allow full use of the program for a short period of time. Various control methods may be used to avoid misuse of object contents. For example, by setting the minimum registration interval for the traveling object to an appropriately large period of time (e.g., 5 a month, or six months or a year), users are prevented from re-using the budget records in the same traveling object.

Another method for controlling the use of traveling objects is to include time-aged keys in the permission records that are 10 incorporated in the traveling object. This is useful generally for traveling objects to ensure that they will not be used beyond a certain date without re-registration, and is particularly useful for traveling objects that are electronically distributed by broadcast, network, or telecommunications (including both one and two way 15 cable), since the date and time of delivery of such traveling objects aging keys can be set to accurately correspond to the time the user came into possession of the object.

Traveling objects can also be used to facilitate "moving" an 20 object from one electronic appliance 600 to another. A user could move a traveling object, with its incorporated one or more permission records 808 from a desktop computer, for example, to

his notebook computer. A traveling object might register its user within itself and thereafter only be useable by that one user. A traveling object might maintain separate budget information, one for the basic distribution budget record, and another for the 5 "active" distribution budget record of the registered user. In this way, the object could be copied and passed to another potential user, and then could be a portable object for that user.

Traveling objects can come in a container which contains 10 other objects. For example, a traveling object container can include one or more content objects and one or more administrative objects for registering the content object(s) in an end user's object registry and/or for providing mechanisms for enforcing permissions and/or other security functions. Contained 15 administrative object(s) may be used to install necessary permission records and/or budget information in the end user's electronic appliance.

Content Objects

20 Figure 20 shows an example of a VDE content object structure 880. Generally, content objects 880 include or provide information content. This "content" may be any sort of electronic

information. For example, content may include: computer software, movies, books, music, information databases, multimedia information, virtual reality information, machine instructions, computer data files, communications messages and/or signals, and other information, at least a portion of which is used and/or manipulated by one or more electronic appliances.

VDE 100 can also be configured for authenticating, controlling, and/or auditing electronic commercial transactions and communications such as inter-bank transactions, electronic purchasing communications, and the transmission of, auditing of, and secure commercial archiving of, electronically signed contracts and other legal documents; the information used for these transactions may also be termed "content." As mentioned above, the content need not be physically stored within the object container but may instead be provided separately at a different time (e.g., a real time feed over a cable).

Content object structure 880 in the particular example shown in Figure 20 is a type of stationary object because it does not include a PERC 808. In this example, content object structure 880 includes, as at least part of its content 812, at least one embedded content object 882 as shown in Figure 5A.

Content object structure 880 may also include an administrative object 870. Thus, objects provided by the preferred embodiment may include one or more "embedded" objects.

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Administrative Objects

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Figure 21 shows an example of an administrative object structure 870 provided by the preferred embodiment. An "administrative object" generally contains permissions, administrative control information, computer software and/or methods associated with the operation of VDE 100.

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Administrative objects may also or alternatively contain records of use, and/or other information used in, or related to, the operation of VDE 100. An administrative object may be distinguished from a content object by the absence of VDE protected "content" for release to an end user for example. Since objects may contain other objects, it is possible for a single object to contain one or more content containing objects and one or more administrative objects. Administrative objects may be used to transmit information between electronic appliances for update,

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usage reporting, billing and/or control purposes. They contain information that helps to administer VDE 100 and keep it operating properly. Administrative objects generally are sent

between two VDE nodes, for example, a VDE clearinghouse service, distributor, or client administrator and an end user's electronic appliance 600.

- 5 **Administrative object structure 870 in this example includes a public header 802, private header 804 (including a "PERC" 808) and a "private body" 806 containing methods 1000.**
- Administrative object structure 870 in this particular example shown in Figure 20 is a type of traveling object because it
- 10 contains a PERC 808, but the administrative object could exclude the PERC 808 and be a stationary object. Rather than storing information content, administrative object structure 870 stores "administrative information content" 872. Administrative information content 872 may, for example, comprise a number of records 872a, 872b, . . . 872n each corresponding to a different
- 15 "event." Each record 872a, 872b, . . . 872n may include an "event" field 874, and may optionally include a parameter field 876 and/or a data field 878. These administrative content records 872 may be used by VDE 100 to define events that may be
- 20 processed during the course of transactions, e.g., an event designed to add a record to a secure database might include parameters 896 indicating how and where the record should be

stored and data field 878 containing the record to be added. In another example, a collection of events may describe a financial transaction between the creator(s) of an administrative object and the recipient(s), such as a purchase, a purchase order, or an invoice. Each event record 872 may be a set of instructions to be executed by the end user's electronic appliance 600 to make an addition or modification to the end user's secure database 610, for example. Events can perform many basic management functions, for example: add an object to the object registry, including providing the associated user/group record(s), rights records, permission record and/or method records; delete audit records (by "rolling up" the audit trail information into, for example, a more condensed, e.g. summary form, or by actual deletion); add or update permissions records 808 for previously registered objects; add or update budget records; add or update user rights records; and add or update load modules.

In the preferred embodiment, an administrative object may be sent, for example, by a distributor, client administrator, or, perhaps, a clearinghouse or other financial service provider, to an end user, or, alternatively, for example, by an object creator to a distributor or service clearinghouse. Administrative objects, for

example, may increase or otherwise adjust budgets and/or permissions of the receiving VDE node to which the administrative object is being sent. Similarly, administrative objects containing audit information in the data area 878 of an event record 872 can be sent from end users to distributors, and/or clearinghouses and/or client administrators, who might themselves further transmit to object creators or to other participants in the object's chain of handling.

10 **Methods**

Methods 1000 in the preferred embodiment support many of the operations that a user encounters in using objects and communicating with a distributor. They may also specify what method fields are displayable to a user (e.g., use events, user request events, user response events, and user display events). Additionally, if distribution capabilities are supported in the method, then the method may support distribution activities, distributor communications with a user about a method, method modification, what method fields are displayable to a distributor, and any distribution database checks and record keeping (e.g., distribution events, distributor request events, and distributor response events).

Given the generality of the existing method structure, and the diverse array of possibilities for assembling methods, a generalized structure may be used for establishing relationships between methods. Since methods 1000 may be independent of an object that requires them during any given session, it is not possible to define the relationships within the methods themselves. "Control methods" are used in the preferred embodiment to define relationships between methods. Control methods may be object specific, and may accommodate an individual object's requirements during each session.

A control method of an object establishes relationships between other methods. These relationships are parameterized with explicit method identifiers when a record set reflecting desired method options for each required method is constructed during a registration process.

An "aggregate method" in the preferred embodiment represents a collection of methods that may be treated as a single unit. A collection of methods that are related to a specific property, for example, may be stored in an aggregate method. This type of aggregation is useful from an implementation point

of view because it may reduce bookkeeping overhead and may improve overall database efficiency. In other cases, methods may be aggregated because they are logically coupled. For example, two budgets may be linked together because one of the budgets represents an overall limitation, and a second budget represents the current limitation available for use. This would arise if, for example, a large budget is released in small amounts over time.

5 For example, an aggregate method that includes meter, billing and budget processes can be used instead of three separate methods. Such an aggregate method may reference a single "load module" 1100 that performs all of the functions of the three separate load modules and use only one user data element that contains meter, billing and budget data. Using an aggregate method instead of three separate methods may minimize overall memory requirements, database searches, decryptions, and the number of user data element writes back to a secure database

10 610. The disadvantage of using an aggregate method instead of three separate methods can be a loss of some flexibility on the part of a provider and user in that various functions may no longer be independently replaceable.

Figure 16 shows methods 1000 as being part of secure database 610.

A "method" 1000 provided by the preferred embodiment is
5 a collection of basic instructions and information related to the basic instructions, that provides context, data, requirements and/or relationships for use in performing, and/or preparing to perform, the basic instructions in relation to the operation of one or more electronic appliances 600. As shown in Figure 16,
10 methods 1000 in the preferred embodiment are represented in secure database 610 by:

- C method "cores" 1000N;
- C Method Data Elements (MDEs) 1202;
- C User Data Elements (UDEs) 1200; and
- 15 C Data Description Elements (DTDs).

Method "core" 1000N in the preferred embodiment may contain or reference one or more data elements such as MDEs 1202 and UDEs 1200. In the preferred embodiment, MDEs 1202 and UDEs 1200 may have the same general characteristics, the main difference between these two types of data elements being that a UDE is preferably tied to a particular method as well as a
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particular user or group of users, whereas an MDE may be tied to a particular method but may be user independent. These MDE and UDE data structures 1200, 1202 are used in the preferred embodiment to provide input data to methods 1000, to receive data outputted by methods, or both. MDEs 1202 and UDEs 1200 may be delivered independently of method cores 1000N that reference them, or the data structures may be delivered as part of the method cores. For example, the method core 1000N in the preferred embodiment may contain one or more MDEs 1202 and/or UDEs 1200 (or portions thereof). Method core 1000N may, alternately or in addition, reference one or more MDE and/or UDE data structures that are delivered independently of method core(s) that reference them.

Method cores 1000N in the preferred embodiment also reference one or more "load modules" 1100. Load modules 1100 in the preferred embodiment comprise executable code, and may also include or reference one or more data structures called "data descriptor" ("DTD") information. This "data descriptor" information may, for example, provide data input information to the DTD interpreter 590. DTDs may enable load modules 1100

to access (e.g., read from and/or write to) the MDE and/or UDE data elements 1202, 1200.

Method cores 1000' may also reference one or more DTD
5 and/or MDE data structures that contain a textual description of their operations suitable for inclusion as part of an electronic contract. The references to the DTD and MDE data structures may occur in the private header of the method core 1000', or may be specified as part of the event table described below.

10

Figure 22 shows an example of a format for a method core 1000N provided by the preferred embodiment. A method core 1000N in the preferred embodiment contains a method event table 1006 and a method local data area 1008. Method event table 15 1006 lists "events." These "events" each reference "load modules" 1100 and/or PERCs 808 that control processing of an event. Associated with each event in the list is any static data necessary to parameterize the load module 1000 or permissions record 808, and reference(s) into method user data area 1008 that are needed 20 to support that event. The data that parameterizes the load module 1100 can be thought of, in part, as a specific function call to the load module, and the data elements corresponding to it

may be thought of as the input and/or output data for that specific function call.

Method cores 1000N can be specific to a single user, or they
5 may be shared across a number of users (e.g., depending upon the uniqueness of the method core and/or the specific user data element). Specifically, each user/group may have its own UDE 1200 and use a shared method core 1000N. This structure allows for lower database overhead than when associating an entire
10 method core 1000N with a user/group. To enable a user to use a method, the user may be sent a method core 1000N specifying a UDE 1200. If that method core 1000N already exists in the site's secure database 610, only the UDE 1200 may need to be added.
15 Alternately, the method may create any required UDE 1200 at registration time.

The Figure 22 example of a format for a method core 1000N provided by the preferred embodiment includes a public (unencrypted) header 802, a private (encrypted) header 804,
20 method event table 1006, and a method local data area 1008.

FULL - DAY USE

An example of a possible field layout for method core 1000N

public header 802 is shown in the following table:

Field Type		Description
Method ID	Creator ID	Site ID of creator of this method.
	Distributor ID	Distributor of this method (e.g., last change).
	Type ID	Constant. indicates method "type."
	Method ID	Unique sequence number for this method.
	Version ID	Version number of this method.
Other classification information	Class ID	ID to support different method "classes."
	Type ID	ID to support method type compatible searching.
Descriptive Information	Description(s)	Textual description(s) of the method.
	Event Summary	Summary of event classes (e.g., USE) that this method supports.

An example of a possible field layout for private header 804

15 is shown below:

	Field Type	Description
	Copy of Public Header 802 Method ID and "Other Classification Information"	Method ID from Public Header
5	Descriptive Information	# of Events # of events supported in this method.
10	Access and Reference Tags	Access tag Tags used to determine if this method is the correct method under management by the SPU; ensure that the method core 1000N is used only under appropriate circumstances.
		Validation tag
		Correlation tag
	Data Structure Reference	Optional Reference to DTD(s) and/or MDE(s)
15	Check Value	Check value for Private Header and method event table.
	Check Value for Public Header	Check Value for Public Header

Referring once again to Figure 22, method event table 1006 may in the preferred embodiment include from 1 to N method event records 1012. Each of these method event records 1012 corresponds to a different event the method 1000 represented by method core 1000N may respond to. Methods 1000 in the preferred embodiment may have completely different behavior depending upon the event they respond to. For example, an

AUDIT method may store information in an audit trail UDE
1200 in response to an event corresponding to a user's use of an
object or other resource. This same AUDIT method may report
the stored audit trail to a VDE administrator or other participant
5 in response to an administrative event such as, for example, a
timer expiring within a VDE node or a request from another VDE
participant to report the audit trail. In the preferred
embodiment, each of these different events may be represented
by an "event code." This "event code" may be passed as a
10 parameter to a method when the method is called, and used to
"look up" the appropriate method event record 1012 within
method event table 1006. The selected method event record
1012, in turn, specifies the appropriate information (e.g., load
module(s) 1100, data element UDE(s) and MDE(s) 1200, 1202,
15 and/or PERC(s) 808) used to construct a component assembly 690
for execution in response to the event that has occurred.

Thus, in the preferred embodiment, each method event
record 1012 may include an event field 1014, a LM/PERC
20 reference field 1016, and any number of data reference fields
1018. Event fields 1014 in the preferred embodiment may
contain a "event code" or other information identifying the

corresponding event. The LM/PERC reference field 1016 may provide a reference into the secure database 610 (or other "pointer" information) identifying a load module 1100 and/or a PERC 808 providing (or referencing) executable code to be loaded and executed to perform the method in response to the event.

5 Data reference fields 1018 may include information referencing a UDE 1200 or a MDE 1202. These data structures may be contained in the method local data area 1008 of the method core 1000N, or they may be stored within the secure database 610 as independent deliverables.

10

The following table is an example of a possible more detailed field layout for a method event record 1012:

15	Field Type	Description
	Event Field 1014	Identifies corresponding event.
	Access tag	Secret tag to grant access to this row of the method event record.
20	LM/PERC Reference Field 1016	Database reference (or local pointer).
	Correlation tag	Correlation tag to assert when referencing this element.

15

Field Type		Description
# of Data Element Reference Fields		Count of data reference fields in the method event record.
Data Reference Field 1	UDE ID or offset/size	Database 610 reference (or local pointer).
	Correlation tag	Correlation tag to assert when referencing this element.
!		...
Data Reference Field n	UDE ID or offset/size	Database 610 reference (or local pointer).
	Correlation tag	Correlation tag to assert when referencing this element.

10

Load Modules

Figure 23 is an example of a load module 1100 provided by the preferred embodiment. In general, load modules 1100 represent a collection of basic functions that are used for control operations.

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Load module 1100 contains code and static data (that is functionally the equivalent of code), and is used to perform the basic operations of VDE 100. Load modules 1100 will generally be shared by all the control structures for all objects in the

20

system, though proprietary load modules are also permitted.

Load modules 1100 may be passed between VDE participants in administrative object structures 870, and are usually stored in secure database 610. They are always encrypted and

- 5 authenticated in both of these cases. When a method core 1000N references a load module 1100, a load module is loaded into the SPE 503, decrypted, and then either passed to the electronic appliance microprocessor for executing in an HPE 655 (if that is where it executes), or kept in the SPE (if that is where it executes). If no SPE 503 is present, the load module may be
10 decrypted by the HPE 655 prior to its execution.

Load module creation by parties is preferably controlled by a certification process or a ring based SPU architecture. Thus,
15 the process of creating new load modules 1100 is itself a controlled process, as is the process of replacing, updating or deleting load modules already stored in a secured database 610.

- 20 A load module 1100 is able to perform its function only when executed in the protected environment of an SPE 503 or an HPE 655 because only then can it gain access to the protected elements (e.g., UDEs 1200, other load modules 1100) on which it

operates. Initiation of load module execution in this environment
is strictly controlled by a combination of access tags, validation
tags, encryption keys, digital signatures and/or correlation tags.
Thus, a load module 1100 may only be referenced if the caller
5 knows its ID and asserts the shared secret correlation tag specific
to that load module. The decrypting SPU may match the
identification token and local access tag of a load module after
decryption. These techniques make the physical replacement of
any load module 1100 detectable at the next physical access of
10 the load module. Furthermore, load modules 1100 may be made
"read only" in the preferred embodiment. The read-only nature
of load modules 1100 prevents the write-back of load modules
that have been tampered with in non-secure space.

15 Load modules are not necessarily directly governed by
PERCs 808 that control them, nor must they contain any
time/date information or expiration dates. The only control
consideration in the preferred embodiment is that one or more
methods 1000 reference them using a correlation tag (the value of
20 a protected object created by the load module's owner, distributed
to authorized parties for inclusion in their methods, and to which
access and use is controlled by one or more PERCs 808). If a

method core 1000N references a load module 1100 and asserts the proper correlation tag (and the load module satisfies the internal tamper checks for the SPE 503), then that load module can be loaded and executed, or it can be acquired from, shipped to, updated, or deleted by, other systems.

5

As shown in Figure 23, load modules 1100 in the preferred embodiment may be constructed of a public (unencrypted) header 802, a private (encrypted) header 804, a private body 1106 containing the encrypted executable code, and one or more data description elements ("DTDs") 1108. The DTDs 1108 may be stored within a load module 1100, or they may be references to static data elements stored in secure database 610.

10

15 The following is an example of a possible field layout for load module public header 802:

Field Type	Description
LM ID	VDE ID of Load Module.
Creator ID	Site ID of creator of this load module.
Type ID	Constant indicates load module type.

Field Type	Description	
	LM ID	Unique sequence number for this load module, which uniquely identifies the load module in a sequence of load modules created by an authorized VDE participant.
	Version ID	Version number of this load module.
Other classification information	Class ID	ID to support different load module classes.
	Type ID	ID to support method type compatible searching.
Descriptive Information	Description	Textual description of the load module.
	Execution space code	Value that describes what execution space (e.g., SPE or HPE) this load module.

5

Many load modules 1100 contain code that executes in an SPE 503. Some load modules 1100 contain code that executes in an HPE 655. This allows methods 1000 to execute in whichever environment is appropriate. For example, an INFORMATION method 1000 can be built to execute only in SPE 503 secure space for government classes of security, or in an HPE 655 for commercial applications. As described above, the load module public header 802 may contain an "execution space code" field

that indicates where the load module 1100 needs to execute. This functionality also allows for different SPE instruction sets as well as different user platforms, and allows methods to be constructed without dependencies on the underlying load module instruction set.

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Load modules 1100 operate on three major data areas: the stack, load module parameters, and data structures. The stack and execution memory size required to execute the load module 10 1100 are preferably described in private header 804, as are the data descriptions from the stack image on load module call, return, and any return data areas. The stack and dynamic areas are described using the same DTD mechanism. The following is an example of a possible layout for a load module private header 15 1104:

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Field Type	Description	
Copy of some or all of information from Object ID from Public Header. public header 802		
Other classification information	Check Value	Check Value for Public Header.
Descriptive Information	LM Size	Size of executable code block.
	LM Exec Size	Executable code size for the load module
	LM Exec Stack	Stack size required for the load module
	Execution space code	Code that describes the execution space of the load module.
Access and reference tags	Access tag	Tags used to determine if the load module has the correct LM requested by the SPE.
	Validation tag	
	Correlation tag	Tag used to determine if the caller of the LM has the right to execute this LM.
	Digital Signature	Used to determine if the LM executable is intact and was created by a trusted source with a correct certificate for creating LMs.
Data record descriptor information	DTD count	Number of DTDs that follow the code block.
	DTD 1 reference	If locally defined, the physical size and bytes of the first DTD defined for this LM. If publicly referenced DTD, this is the URL and the correlation tag to permit access to the record.

	DTD N reference	If locally defined, the physical size and bytes of the Nth DTD defined for this L If publicly referenced DTD, this is the and the correlation tag to permit access record.
Check Value		Check Value for entire LM.

Each load module 1100 also may use DTD 1108

5 information to provide the information necessary to support building methods from a load module. This DTD information contains the definition expressed in a language such as SGML for the names and data types of all of the method data fields that the load module supports, and the acceptable ranges of values that 10 can be placed in the fields. Other DTDs may describe the function of the load module 1100 in English for inclusion in an electronic contract, for example.

15 The next section of load module 1100 is an encrypted executable body 1106 that contains one or more blocks of encrypted code. Load modules 1100 are preferably coded in the "native" instruction set of their execution environment for efficiency and compactness. SPU 500 and platform providers may provide versions of the standard load modules 1100 in order

to make their products cooperate with the content in distribution mechanisms contemplated by VDE 100. The preferred embodiment creates and uses native mode load modules 1100 in lieu of an interpreted or "p-code" solution to optimize the
5 performance of a limited resource SPU. However, when sufficient SPE (or HPE) resources exist and/or platforms have sufficient resources, these other implementation approaches may improve the cross platform utility of load module code.

The following is an example of a field layout for a load module DTD 1108:

	Field Type	Description
5	DTD ID	<u>Uses Object ID from Private Header.</u>
	Creator ID	<u>Site ID of creator of this DTD.</u>
	Type ID	<u>Constant.</u>
	DTD ID	<u>Unique sequence number for this DTD.</u>
	Version ID	<u>Version number of this DTD.</u>
10	Descriptive Information	DTD Size <u>Size of DTD block.</u>
	Access and reference tags	Access tag <u>Tags used to determine if the DTD is the DTD requested by the SPE.</u>
		Validation tag
		Correlation tag <u>Tag used to determine if the caller of this has the right to use the DTD.</u>
10	DTD Body	DTD Data Definition 1
		DTD Data Definition 2
		DTD Data Definition N
	Check Value	Check Value for entire DTD record.

Some examples of how load modules 1100 may use DTDs 1108 include:

- C Increment data element (defined by name in DTD3) value in data area DTD4 by value in DTD1
 - 5 C Set data element (defined by name in DTD3) value in data area DTD4 to value in DTD3
 - C Compute atomic element from event in DTD1 from table in DTD3 and return in DTD2
 - 10 C Compute atomic element from event in DTD1 from equation in DTD3 and return in DTD2
 - C Create load module from load module creation template referenced in DTD3
 - 15 C Modify load module in DTD3 using content in DTD4
 - C Destroy load module named in DTD3
- 20 Commonly used load modules 1100 may be built into a SPU 500 as space permits. VDE processes that use built-in load modules 1100 will have significantly better performance than processes that have to find, load and decrypt external load modules. The most useful load modules 1100 to build into a SPU 25 might include scaler meters, fixed price billing, budgets and load modules for aggregate methods that perform these three processes.

**User Data Elements (UDEs) 1200 and Method Data Elements
(MDEs) 1202**

User Data Elements (UDEs) 1200 and Method Data
Elements (MDEs) 1202 in the preferred embodiment store data.

There are many types of UDEs 1200 and MDEs 1202 provided by the preferred embodiment. In the preferred embodiment, each of these different types of data structures shares a common overall format including a common header definition and naming scheme. Other UDEs 1200 that share this common structure include "local name services records" (to be explained shortly) and account information for connecting to other VDE participants. These elements are not necessarily associated with an individual user, and may therefore be considered MDEs 1202.

All UDEs 1200 and all MDEs 1202 provided by the preferred embodiment may, if desired, (as shown in Figure 16) be stored in a common physical table within secure database 610, and database access processes may commonly be used to access all of these different types of data structures.

In the preferred embodiment, PERCs 808 and user rights table records are types of UDE 1200. There are many other types of UDEs 1200/MDEs 1202, including for example, meters, meter

trails, budgets, budget trails, and audit trails. Different formats for these different types of UDEs/MDEs are defined, as described above, by SGML definitions contained within DTDs 1108.

Methods 1000 use these DTDs to appropriately access
5 UDEs/MDEs 1200, 1202.

Secure database 610 stores two types of items: static and dynamic. Static data structures and other items are used for information that is essentially static information. This includes
10 load modules 1100, PERCs 808, and many components of methods. These items are not updated frequently and contain expiration dates that can be used to prevent "old" copies of the information from being substituted for newly received items.
These items may be encrypted with a site specific secure
15 database file key when they are stored in the secure database 610, and then decrypted using that key when they are loaded into the SPE.

Dynamic items are used to support secure items that must
20 be updated frequently. The UDEs 1200 of many methods must be updated and written out of the SPE 503 after each use.
Meters and budgets are common examples of this. Expiration

dates cannot be used effectively to prevent substitution of the
previous copy of a budget UDE 1200. To secure these frequently
updated items, a transaction tag is generated and included in the
encrypted item each time that item is updated. A list of all VDE
5 item IDs and the current transaction tag for each item is
maintained as part of the secure database 610.

Figure 24 shows an example of a user data element
("UDE") 1200 provided by the preferred embodiment. As shown
10 in Figure 24, UDE 1200 in the preferred embodiment includes a
public header 802, a private header 804, and a data area 1206.
The layout for each of these user data elements 1200 is generally
defined by an SGML data definition contained within a DTD
1108 associated with one or more load modules 1100 that operate
15 on the UDE 1200.

UDEs 1200 are preferably encrypted using a site specific
key once they are loaded into a site. This site-specific key masks
a validation tag that may be derived from a cryptographically
20 strong pseudo-random sequence by the SPE 503 and updated
each time the record is written back to the secure database 610.
This technique provides reasonable assurance that the UDE 1200

has not been tampered with nor substituted when it is requested
by the system for the next use.

Meters and budgets are perhaps among the most common
5 data structures in VDE 100. They are used to count and record
events, and also to limit events. The data structures for each
meter and budget are determined by the content provider or a
distributor/redistributor authorized to change the information.
Meters and budgets, however, generally have common
10 information stored in a common header format (e.g., user ID, site
ID and related identification information).

The content provider or distributor/redistributor may
specify data structures for each meter and budget UDE.
15 Although these data structures vary depending upon the
particular application, some are more common than others. The
following table lists some of the more commonly occurring data
structures for METER and BUDGET methods:

20

	Field type	Format	Typical Use	Description or Use
5	Ascending Use Counter	byte, short, long, or unsigned versions of the same widths	Meter/Budget	Ascending count of use
	Descending Use Counter	byte, short, long, or unsigned versions of the same widths	Budget	Descending count of permitted use; eg., remaining budget.
10	Counter/Limit	2, 4 or 8 byte integer split into two related bytes or words	Meter/Budget	usage limits since a specific time; generally used in compound meter data structures.
	Bitmap	Array bytes	Meter/Budget	Bit indicator of use or ownership.
	Wide bitmap	Array of bytes	Meter/Budget	Indicator of use or ownership that may aggregate with time.
	Last Use Date	time_t	Meter/Budget	Date of last use.
	Start Date	time_t	Budget	Date of first allowable
	Expiration Date	time_t	Meter/Budget	Expiration Date.
	Last Audit Date	time_t	Meter/Budget	Date of last audit.
	Next Audit Date	time_t	Meter/Budget	Date of next required audit.
15	Auditor	VDE ID	Meter/Budget	VDE ID of authorized auditor.

The information in the table above is not complete or comprehensive, but rather is intended to show some examples of types of information that may be stored in meter and budget

related data structures. The actual structure of particular
meters and budgets is determined by one or more DTDs 1108
associated with the load modules 1100 that create and
manipulate the data structure. A list of data types permitted by
5 the DTD interpreter 590 in VDE 100 is extensible by properly
authorized parties.

Figure 25 shows an example of one particularly advantageous kind of UDE 1200 data area 1206. This data area 1206 defines a "map" that may be used to record usage information. For example, a meter method 1000 may maintain one or more "usage map" data areas 1206. The usage map may be a "usage bit map" in the sense that it stores one or more bits of information (i.e., a single or multi-dimensional bit image) corresponding to each of several types or categories of usage. Usage maps are an efficient means for referencing prior usage. For example, a usage map data area may be used by a meter method 1000 to record all applicable portions of information content that the user has paid to use, thus supporting a very efficient and flexible means for allowing subsequent user usage of the same portions of the information content. This may enable certain VDE related security functions such as "contiguity," "logical relatedness," randomization of usage, and other usage types. Usage maps may be analyzed for other usage patterns (e.g., quantity discounting, or for enabling a user to reaccess information content for which the user previously paid for unlimited usage).

The "usage map" concept provided by the preferred embodiment may be tied to the concept of "atomic elements." In the preferred embodiment, usage of an object 300 may be

metered in terms of "atomic elements." In the preferred embodiment, an "atomic element" in the metering context defines a unit of usage that is "sufficiently significant" to be recorded in a meter. The definition of what constitutes an "atomic element" is determined by the creator of an object 300. For instance, a "byte" of information content contained in an object 300 could be defined as an "atomic element," or a record of a database could be defined as an "atomic element," or each chapter of an electronically published book could be defined as an "atomic element."

An object 300 can have multiple sets of overlapping atomic elements. For example, an access to any database in a plurality of databases may be defined as an "atomic element." Simultaneously, an access to any record, field of records, sectors of informations, and/or bytes contained in any of the plurality of databases might also be defined as an "atomic element." In an electronically published newspaper, each hundred words of an article could be defined as an "atomic element," while articles of more than a certain length could be defined as another set of "atomic elements." Some portions of a newspaper (e.g., advertisements, the classified section, etc.) might not be mapped into an atomic element.

The preferred embodiment provides an essentially unbounded ability for the object creator to define atomic element

types. Such atomic element definitions may be very flexible to accommodate a wide variety of different content usage. Some examples of atomic element types supported by the preferred embodiment include bytes, records, files, sectors, objects, a quantity of bytes, contiguous or relatively contiguous bytes (or other predefined unit types), logically related bytes containing content that has some logical relationship by topic, location or other user specifiable logic of relationship, etc. Content creators preferably may flexibly define other types of atomic elements.

The preferred embodiment of the present invention provides EVENT methods to provide a mapping between usage events and atomic elements. Generally, there may be an EVENT method for each different set of atomic elements defined for an object 300. In many cases, an object 300 will have at least one type of atomic element for metering relating to billing, and at least one other atomic element type for non-billing related metering (e.g., used to, for example, detect fraud, bill advertisers, and/or collect data on end user usage activities).

In the preferred embodiment, each EVENT method in a usage related context performs two functions: (1) it maps an accessed event into a set of zero or more atomic elements, and (2) it provides information to one or more METER methods for metering object usage. The definition used to define this

mapping between access events and atomic elements may be in the form of a mathematical definition, a table, a load module, etc. When an EVENT method maps an access request into "zero" atomic elements, a user accessed event is not mapped into any atomic element based on the particular atomic element definition that applies. This can be, for example, the object owner is not interested in metering usage based on such accesses (e.g., because the object owner deems such accesses to be insignificant from a metering standpoint).

A "usage map" may employ a "bit map image" for storage of usage history information in a highly efficient manner. Individual storage elements in a usage map may correspond to atomic elements. Different elements within a usage map may correspond to different atomic elements (e.g., one map element may correspond to number of bytes read, another map element may correspond to whether or not a particular chapter was opened, and yet another map element may correspond to some other usage event).

One of the characteristics of a usage map provided by the preferred embodiment of the present invention is that the significance of a map element is specified, at least in part, by the position of the element within the usage map. Thus, in a usage map provided by the preferred embodiment, the information

indicated or encoded by a map element is a function of its position (either physically or logically) within the map structure. As one simple example, a usage map for a twelve-chapter novel could consist of twelve elements, one for each chapter of the novel. When the user opens the first chapter, one or more bits within the element corresponding to the first chapter could be changed in value (e.g., set to "one"). In this simple example where the owner of the content object containing the novel was interested only in metering which chapters had been opened by the user, the usage map element corresponding to a chapter could be set to "one" the first time the user opened that corresponding chapter, and could remain "one" no matter how many additional times the user opened the chapter. The object owner or other interested VDE participant would be able to rapidly and efficiently tell which chapter(s) had been opened by the user simply by examining the compact usage map to determine which elements were set to "one."

Suppose that the content object owner wanted to know how many times the user had opened each chapter of the novel. In this case, the usage map might comprise, for a twelve-chapter novel, twelve elements each of which has a one-to-one correspondence with a different one of the twelve chapters of the novel. Each time a user opens a particular chapter, the corresponding METER method might increment the value contained in the corresponding usage map element. In this way,

an account could be readily maintained for each of the chapters of the novel.

The position of elements within a usage map may encode a multi-variable function. For example, the elements within a usage map may be arranged in a two-dimensional array as shown in Figure 25B. Different array coordinates could correspond to independent variables such as, for example, atomic elements and time. Suppose, as an example, that a content object owner distributes an object containing a collection of audio recordings. Assume further that the content object owner wants to track the number of times the user listens to each recording within the collection, and also wants to track usage based on month of the year. Thus, assume that the content object owner wishes to know how many times the user during the month of January listened to each of the recordings on a recording-by-recording basis, similarly wants to know this same information for the month of February, March, etc. In this case, the usage map (see Figure 25B) might be defined as a two-dimensional array of elements. One dimension of the array might encode audio recording number. The other dimension of the array might encode month of the year. During the month of January, the corresponding METER method would increment elements in the array in the "January" column of the array, selecting which element to increment as a function of recording number. When January

comes to an end, the METER method might cease writing into the array elements in the January column, and instead write values into a further set of February array elements—once again selecting the particular array element in this column as a function of recording number. This concept may be extended to N dimensions encoding N different variables.

Usage map meters are thus an efficient means for referencing prior usage. They may be used to enable certain VDE related security functions such as testing for contiguousness (including relative contiguousness), logical relatedness (including relative logical relatedness), usage randomization, and other usage patterns. For example, the degree or character of the "randomness" of content usage by a user might serve as a potential indicator of attempts to circumvent VDE content budget limitations. A user or groups of users might employ multiple sessions to extract content in a manner which does not violate contiguousness, logical relatedness or quantity limitations, but which nevertheless enables reconstruction of a material portion or all of a given, valuable unit of content. Usage maps can be analyzed to determine other patterns of usage for pricing such as, for example, quantity discounting after usage of a certain quantity of any or certain atomic units, or for enabling a user to reaccess an object for which the user previously paid for unlimited accesses (or unlimited accesses over a certain time

duration). Other useful analyses might include discounting for a given atomic unit for a plurality of uses.

A further example of a map meter includes storing a record of all applicable atomic elements that the user has paid to use (or alternatively, has been metered as having used, though payment may not yet have been required or made). Such a usage map would support a very efficient and flexible way to allow subsequent user usage of the same atomic elements.

A further usage map could be maintained to detect fraudulent usage of the same object. For example, the object might be stored in such a way that sequential access of long blocks should never occur. A METER method could then record all applicable atomic elements accesses during, for example, any specified increment of time, such as ten minutes, an hour, a day, a month, a year, or other time duration). The usage map could be analyzed at the end of the specified time increment to check for an excessively long contiguous set of accessed blocks, and/or could be analyzed at the initiation of each access to applicable atomic elements. After each time duration based analysis, if no fraudulent use is detected, the usage map could be cleared (or partially cleared) and the mapping process could begin in whole or in part anew. If a fraudulent use pattern is suspected or detected, that information might be recorded and the use of the

object could be halted. For example, the user might be required to contact a content provider who might then further analyze the usage information to determine whether or not further access should be permitted.

Figure 25c shows a particular type of "wide bit map" usage record 1206 wherein each entry in the usage record corresponds to usage during a particular time period (e.g., current month usage, last month's usage, usage in the month before last, etc.). The usage record shown thus comprises an array of "flags" or fields 1206, each element in the array being used to indicate usage in a different time period in this particular example. When a time period ends, all elements 1206 in the array may be shifted one position, and thus usage information (or the purchase of user access rights) over a series of time periods can be reflected by a series of successive array elements. In the specific example shown in Figure 25c, the entire wide array 1206 is shifted by one array position each month, with the oldest array element being deleted and the new array element being "turned" in a new array map corresponding to the current time period. In this example, record 1302 tracks usage access rights and/or other usage related activities during the present calendar month as well for the five immediately prior calendar months. Corresponding billing and/or billing method 406 may inspect the map, determine usage as related to billing and/or security monitoring for current usage

based on a formula that employs the usage data stored in the record, and updates the wide record to indicate the applicable array elements for which usage occurred or the like. A wide bit map may also be used for many other purposes such as maintaining an element by element count of usage, or the contiguousness, relatedness, etc. function described above, or some combination of functionality.

Audit trail maps may be generated at any frequency determined by control, meter, budget and billing methods and load modules associated with those methods. Audit trails have a similar structure to meters and budgets and they may contain user specific information in addition to information about the usage event that caused them to be created. Like meters and budgets, audit trails have a dynamic format that is defined by the content provider or their authorized designee, and share the basic element types for meters and budgets shown in the table above. In addition to these types, the following table lists some examples of other significant data fields that may be found in audit trails:

Field type	Format	Typical Use	Description of Use
Use Event ID	unsigned long	Meter/Budget/ Billing	Event ID that started a processing sequence.
Internal Sequence Number	unsigned long	Meter/Budget/ Billing	Transaction number to help detect audits that have been tampered with.

Field type	Format	Typical Use	Description of Use
Atomic Element(s) & Object ID	Unsigned integer(s) of appropriate width	Meter/Billing	Atomic element(s) and ID of object that was used.
Personal User Information	Character or other information	Budget/Billing	Personal information about user.
Use Date/Time	time_t	Meter/Budget/Billing	Date/time of use.
Site ID/User ID	VDE ID	Meter/Budget/Billing	VDE ID of user.

Audit trail records may be automatically combined into single records to conserve header space. The combination process may, for example, occur under control of a load module that creates individual audit trail records.

Permissions Record Overview

Figure 16 also shows that PERCs 808 may be stored as part of secure database 610. Permissions records ("PERCs") 808 are at the highest level of the data driven control hierarchy provided by the preferred embodiment of VDE 100. Basically, there is at least one PERC 808 that corresponds to each information and/or transactional content distributed by VDE 100. Thus, at least one PERC 808 exists for each VDE object 300 in the preferred embodiment. Some objects may have multiple

corresponding PERCs 808. PERC 808 controls how access and/or manipulation permissions are distributed and/or how content and/or other information may otherwise be used. PERC 808 also specifies the "rights" of each VDE participant in and to the content and/or other information.

In the preferred embodiment, no end user may use or access a VDE object unless a permissions record 808 has been delivered to the end user. As discussed above, a PERC 808 may be delivered as part of a traveling object 860 or it may be delivered separately (for example, within an administrative object). An electronic appliance 600 may not access an object unless a corresponding PERC 808 is present, and may only use the object and related information as permitted by the control structures contained within the PERC.

Briefly, the PERC 808 stores information concerning the methods, method options, decryption keys and rights with respect to a corresponding VDE object 300.

PERC 808 includes control structures that define high level categories or classifications of operations. These high level categories are referred to as "rights." The "right" control structures, in turn, provide internal control structures that reference "methods" 1000. The internal structure of preferred

embodiment PERC 808 organizes the "methods" that are required to perform each allowable operation on an object or associated control structure (including operations performed on the PERC itself). For example, PERC 808 contains decryption keys for the object, and usage of the keys is controlled by the methods that are required by the PERC for performing operations associated with the exercise of a "right."

PERC 808 for an object is typically created when the object is created, and future substantive modifications of a PERC, if allowed, are controlled by methods associated with operations using the distribution right(s) defined by the same (or different) PERC.

Figure 22 shows the internal structures present in an example of a PERC 808 provided by the preferred embodiment. All of the structures shown represent (or reference) collections of methods required to process a corresponding object in some specific way. PERCs 808 are organized as a hierarchical structure, and the basic elements of the hierarchy are as follows:

"rights" records 906

"control sets" 914

"required method" records 920 and

"required method options" 924.

There are other elements that may be included in a PERC 808 hierarchy that describe rules and the rule options to support the negotiation of rule sets and control information for smart objects and for the protection of a user's personal information by a privacy filter. These alternate elements may include:

- optional rights records
- optional control sets
- optional method records
- permitted rights records
- permitted rights control sets
- permitted method records
- required DTD descriptions
- optional DTD descriptions
- permitted DTD descriptions

These alternate fields can control other processes that may, in part, base negotiations or decisions regarding their operation on the contents of these fields. Rights negotiation, smart object control information, and related processes can use these fields for more precise control of their operation.

The PERC 808 shown in Figure 26 includes a PERC header 900, a CS0 ("control set 0") 902, private body keys 904, and one or more rights sub-records 906. Control set 0 902 in the preferred embodiment contains information that is common to one or more "rights" associated with an object 300. For example,

a particular "event" method or methods might be the same for usage rights, extraction rights and/or other rights. In that case, "control set 0" 902 may reference this event that is common across multiple "rights." The provision of "control set 0" 902 is actually an optimization, since it would be possible to store different instances of a commonly-used event within each of plural "rights" records 906 of a PERC 808.

Each rights record 906 defines a different "right" corresponding to an object. A "right" record 906 is the highest level of organization present in PERC 808. There can be several different rights in a PERC 808. A "right" represents a major functional partitioning desired by a participant of the basic architecture of VDE 100. For example, the right to use an object and the right to distribute rights to use an object are major functional groupings within VDE 100. Some examples of possible rights include access to content, permission to distribute rights to access content, the ability to read and process audit trails related to content and/or control structures, the right to perform transactions that may or may not be related to content and/or related control structures (such as banking transactions, catalog purchases, the collection of taxes, EDI transactions, and such), and the ability to change some or all of the internal structure of PERCs created for distribution to other users. PERC 808

contains a rights record 906 for each type of right to object access/use the PERC grants.

Normally, for VDE end users, the most frequently granted right is a usage right. Other types of rights include the "extraction right," the "audit right" for accessing audit trail information of end users, and a "distribution right" to distribute an object. Each of these different types of rights may be embodied in a different rights record 906 (or alternatively, different PERCs 808 corresponding to an object may be used to grant different rights).

Each rights record 906 includes a rights record header 908, a CSR ("control set for right") 910, one or more "right keys" 912, and one or more "control sets" 914. Each "rights" record 906 contains one or more control sets 914 that are either required or selectable options to control an object in the exercise of that "right." Thus, at the next level, inside of a "right" 906, are control sets 914. Control sets 914, in turn, each includes a control set header 916, a control method 918, and one or more required methods records 920. Required methods records 920, in turn, each includes a required method header 922 and one or more required method options 924.

Control sets 914 exist in two types in VDE 100: common required control sets which are given designations "control set 0" or "control set for right," and a set of control set options. "Control set 0" 902 contains a list of required methods that are common to all control set options, so that the common required methods do not have to be duplicated in each control set option. A "control set for right" ("CSR") 910 contains a similar list for control sets within a given right. "Control set 0" and any "control sets for rights" are thus, as mentioned above, optimizations; the same functionality for the control sets can be accomplished by listing all the common required methods in each control set option and omitting "control set 0" and any "control sets for rights."

One of the control set options, "control set 0" and the appropriate "control set for right" together form a complete control set necessary to exercise a right.

Each control set option contains a list of required methods 1000 and represents a different way the right may be exercised. Only one of the possible complete control sets 914 is used at any one time to exercise a right in the preferred embodiment.

Each control set 914 contains as many required methods records 920 as necessary to satisfy all of the requirements of the creators and/or distributors for the exercise of a right. Multiple

ways a right may be exercised, or multiple control sets that govern how a given right is exercised, are both supported. As an example, a single control set 914 might require multiple meter and budget methods for reading the object's content, and also require different meter and budget methods for printing an object's content. Both reading and printing an object's content can be controlled in a single control set 914.

Alternatively, two different control set options could support reading an object's content by using one control set option to support metering and budgeting the number of bytes read, and the other control set option to support metering and budgeting the number of paragraphs read. One or the other of these options would be active at a time.

Typically, each control set 914 will reference a set of related methods, and thus different control sets can offer a different set of method options. For example, one control set 914 may represent one distinct kind of metering methodology, and another control set may represent another, entirely different distinct metering methodology.

At the next level inside a control set 914 are the required methods records 920. Methods records 920 contain or reference methods 1000 in the preferred embodiment. Methods 1000 are a

collection of "events," references to load modules associated with these events, static data, and references to a secure database 610 for automatic retrieval of any other separately deliverable data elements that may be required for processing events (e.g., UDEs). A control set 914 contains a list of required methods that must be used to exercise a specific right (i.e., process events associated with a right). A required method record 920 listed in a control set 914 indicates that a method must exist to exercise the right that the control set supports. The required methods may reference "load modules" 1100 to be discussed below. Briefly, load modules 1100 are pieces of executable code that may be used to carry out required methods.

Each control set 914 may have a control method record 918 as one of its required methods. The referenced control method may define the relationships between some or all of the various methods 1000 defined by a control set 906. For example, a control method may indicate which required methods are functionally grouped together to process particular events, and the order for processing the required methods. Thus, a control method may specify that required method referenced by record 920(a)(1)(i) is the first to be called and then its output is to go to required method referenced by record 920(a)(1)(ii) and so on. In this way, a meter method may be tied to one or more billing

methods and then the billing methods may be individually tied to different budget methods, etc.

Required method records 920 specify one or more required method options 924. Required method options are the lowest level of control structure in a preferred embodiment PERC 808. By parameterizing the required methods and specifying the required method options 924 independently of the required methods, it becomes possible to reuse required methods in many different circumstances.

For example, a required method record 920 may indicate that an actual budget method ID must be chosen from the list of budget method IDs in the required method option list for that required method. Required method record 920 in this case does not contain any method IDs for information about the type of method required, it only indicates that a method is required. Required method option 924 contains the method ID of the method to be used if this required method option is selected. As a further optimization, an actual method ID may be stored if only one option exists for a specific required method. This allows the size of this data structure to be decreased.

PERC 808 also contains the fundamental decryption keys for an object 300, and any other keys used with "rights" (for

encoding and/or decoding audit trails, for example). It may contain the keys for the object content or keys to decrypt portions of the object that contain other keys that then can be used to decrypt the content of the object. Usage of the keys is controlled by the control sets 914 in the same "right" 906 within PERC 808.

In more detail, Figure 26 shows PERC 808 as including private body keys 904, and right keys 912. Private body keys 904 are used to decrypt information contained within a private body 806 of a corresponding VDE object 300. Such information may include, for example, methods 1000, load modules 1100 and/or UDEs 1200, for example. Right keys 912 are keys used to exercise a right in the preferred embodiment. Such right keys 912 may include, for example, decryption keys that enable a method specified by PERC 808 to decrypt content for release by a VDE node to an end user. These right keys 912 are, in the preferred embodiment, unique to an object 300. Their usage is preferably controlled by budgets in the preferred embodiment.

Detailed Example of a PERC 808

Figures 26A and 26B show one example of a preferred embodiment PERC 808. In this example, PERC header 900 includes:

a site record number 926,

a field 928 specifying the length of the private body key block,
a field 930 specifying the length of the PERC,
an expiration date/time field 932 specifying the expiration date and/or time for the PERC,
a last modification date/time field 934 specifying the last date and/or time the PERC 808 was modified,
the original distributor ID field 936 that specifies who originally distributed the PERC and/or corresponding object,
a last distributor field 938 that specifies who was the last distributor of the PERC and/or the object,
an object ID field 940 identifying the corresponding VDE object 300,
a field 942 that specifies the class and/or type of PERC and/or the instance ID for the record class to differentiate the PERCs of the same type that may differ in their particulars,
a field 944 specifying the number of "rights" sub-records 906 within the PERC, and
a validation tag 948.

The PERC 808 shown in Figures 26a, 26b also has private body keys stored in a private body key block 950.

This PERC 808 includes a control set 0 sub-record 914 (0) that may be used commonly by all of rights 906 within the PERC. This control set 0 record 914(0) may include the following fields:

a length field 952 specifying the length of the control set 0 record

a field 954 specifying the number of required method records 920 within the control set

an access tag field 956 specifying an access tag to control modification of the record and one or more required method records 920.

Each required method record 920, in turn may include:

a length field 958 specifying the length of the required method record

a field 960 specifying the number of method option records within the required method record 920

an access tag field 962 specifying an access tag to control modification of the record and one or more method option records 924.

Each method option sub-record 924 may include:

a length field 964 specifying the length of the method option record

a length field 966 specifying the length of the data area (if any) corresponding to the method option record

a method ID field 968 specifying a method ID (e.g.,
type/owner/class-instance)
a correlation tag field 970 specifying a correlation
tag for correlating with the method specified in
field 968
an access tag field 972 specifying an access tag to
control modification of this record
a method-specific attributes field 974
a data area 976 and
a check value field 978 for validation purposes

In this example of PERC 808 also includes one or more rights records 906, and an overall check value field 980. Figure 23b is an example of one of right records 906 shown in Figure 16a. In this particular example, rights record 906a includes a rights record header 908 comprising:

a length field 982 specifying the length of the rights key block 912
a length field 984 specifying the length of the rights record 908
an expiration date/time field 986 specifying the expiration date and/or time for the rights record
a right ID field 988 identifying a right

a number field 990 specifying the number of control sets 914 within the rights record 906, and an access tag field 992 specifying an access tag to control modification of the right record.

This example of rights record 906 includes:

a control set for this right (CSR) 910
a rights key block 912
one or more control sets 914, and
a check value field 994.

Object Registry

Referring once again to Figure 16, secure database 610 provides data structures that support a "lookup" mechanism for "registered" objects. This "lookup" mechanism permits electronic appliance 600 to associate, in a secure way, VDE objects 300 with PERCs 808, methods 1000 and load modules 1100. In the preferred embodiment, this lookup mechanism is based in part on data structures contained within object registry 450.

In one embodiment, object registry 450 includes the following tables:

- an object registration table 460;
- a subject table 462;
- a User Rights Table ("URT") 464;

- an Administrative Event Log 442;
- a shipping table 444; and
- a receiving table 446.

Object registry 460 in the example embodiment is a database of information concerning registered VDE objects 300 and the rights of users and user groups with regard to those objects. When electronic appliance 600 receives an object 300 containing a new budget or load module 1100, the electronic appliance usually needs to add the information contained by the object to secure database 610. Moreover, when any new VDE object 300 arrives at an electronic appliance 600, the electronic appliance must "register" the object within object registry 450 so that it can be accessed. The lists and records for a new object 300 are built in the preferred embodiment when the object is "registered" by the electronic appliance 600. The information for the object may be obtained from the object's encrypted private header, object body, and encrypted name services record. This information may be extracted or derived from the object 300 by SPE 503, and then stored within secure database 610 as encrypted records.

In one embodiment, object registration table 460 includes information identifying objects within object storage (repository) 728. These VDE objects 300 stored within object storage 728 are

not, in the example embodiment, necessarily part of secure database 610 since the objects typically incorporate their own security (as necessary and required) and are maintained using different mechanisms than the ones used to maintain the secure database. Even though VDE objects 300 may not strictly be part of secure database 610, object registry 450 (and in particular, object registration table 460) refers to the objects and thus "incorporates them by reference" into the secure database. In the preferred embodiment, an electronic appliance 600 may be disabled from using any VDE object 300 that has not been appropriately registered with a corresponding registration record stored within object registration table 460.

Subject table 462 in the example embodiment establishes correspondence between objects referred to by object registration table 460 and users (or groups of users) of electronic appliance 600. Subject table 462 provides many of the attributes of an access control list ("ACL"), as will be explained below.

User rights table 464 in the example embodiment provides permissioning and other information specific to particular users or groups of users and object combinations set forth in subject table 462. In the example embodiment, permissions records 808 (also shown in Figure 16 and being stored within secure database 610) may provide a universe of permissioning for a particular

object-user combination. Records within user rights table 464 may specify a sub-set of this permissioning universe based on, for example, choices made by users during interaction at time of object registration.

Administrative event log 442, shipping table 444, and receiving table 446 provide information about receipts and deliveries of VDE objects 300. These data structures keep track of administrative objects sent or received by electronic appliance 600 including, for example, the purpose and actions of the administrative objects in summary and detailed form. Briefly, shipping table 444 includes a shipping record for each administrative object sent (or scheduled to be sent) by electronic appliance 600 to another VDE participant. Receiving table 446 in the preferred embodiment includes a receiving record for each administrative object received (or scheduled to be received) by electronic appliance 600. Administrative event log 442 includes an event log record for each shipped and each received administrative object, and may include details concerning each distinct event specified by received administrative objects.

Administrative Object Shipping and Receiving

Figure 27 is an example of a detailed format for a shipping table 444. In the preferred embodiment, shipping table 444 includes a header 444A and any number of shipping records 445.

Header 444A includes information used to maintain shipping table 444. Each shipping record 445 within shipping table 444 provides details concerning a shipping event (i.e., either a completed shipment of an administrative object to another VDE participant, or a scheduled shipment of an administrative object).

In the example embodiment of the secure database 610, shipping table header 444A may include a site record number 444A(1), a user (or group) ID 444A(2), a series of reference fields 444A(3)-444A(6), validation tags 444A(7)-444A(8), and a check value field 444A(9). The fields 444A(3)-444A(6) reference certain recent IDs that designate lists of shipping records 445 within shipping table 444. For example, field 444A(3) may reference to a "first" shipping record representing a completed outgoing shipment of an administrative object, and field 444A(4) may reference to a "last" shipping record representing a completed outgoing shipment of an administrative object. In this example, "first" and "last" may, if desired, refer to time or order of shipment as one example. Similarly, fields 444A(5) and 444A(6) may reference to "first" and "last" shipping records for scheduled outgoing shipments. Validation tag 444A(7) may provide validation from a name services record within name services record table 452 associated with the user (group) ID in the header. This permits access from the shipping record back to the

name services record that describes the sender of the object described by the shipping records. Validation tag 444A(8) provides validation for a "first" outgoing shipping record referenced by one or more of pointers 444A(3)-444A(6). Other validation tags may be provided for validation of scheduled shipping record(s).

Shipping record 444(1) shown includes a site record number 445(1)(A). It also includes first and last scheduled shipment date/times 445(1)(B), 445(1)(C) providing a window of time used for scheduling administrative object shipments. Field 445(1)(D) may specify an actual date/time of a completed shipment of an administrative object. Field 445(1)(E) provides an ID of an administrative object shipped or to be shipped, and thus identifies which administrative object within object storage 728 pertains to this particular shipping record. A reference field 445(1)(G) references a name services record within name services record table 452 specifying the actual or intended recipient of the administrative object shipped or to be shipped. This information within name services record table 452 may, for example, provide routing information sufficient to permit outgoing administrative objects manager 754 shown in Figure 12 to inform object switch 734 to ship the administrative object to the intended recipient. A field 445(1)(H) may specify (e.g., using a series of bit flags) the purpose of the administrative object shipment, and a field

445(1)(I) may specify the status of the shipment. Reference fields 445(1)(J), 445(1)(K) may reference "previous" and "next" shipping records 445 in a linked list (in the preferred embodiment, there may be two linked lists, one for completed shipping records and the other for scheduled shipping records). Fields 445(1)(L) - 445(1)(P) may provide validation tags respectively from header 444A, to a record within administrative event log 442 pointed to by pointer 445(1)(F); to the name services record referenced by field 445(1)(G); from the previous record referenced by 445(1)(J); and to the next record referenced by field 445(1)(K). A check value field 445(1)(Q) may be used for validating shipping record 445.

Figure 28 shows an example of one possible detailed format for a receiving table 446. In one embodiment, receiving table 446 has a structure that is similar to the structure of the shipping table 444 shown in Figure 27. Thus, for example, receiving table 446 may include a header 446a and a plurality of receiving records 447, each receiving record including details about a particular reception or scheduled reception of an administrative object. Receiving table 446 may include two linked lists, one for completed receptions and another for schedule receptions. Receiving table records 447 may each reference an entry within name services record table 452 specifying an administrative object sender, and may each point to an entry within

administrative event log 442. Receiving records 447 may also include additional details about scheduled and/or completed reception (e.g., scheduled or actual date/time of reception, purpose of reception and status of reception), and they may each include validation tags for validating references to other secure database records.

Figure 29 shows an example of a detailed format for an administrative event log 442. In the preferred embodiment, administrative event log 442 includes an event log record 442(1) . . . 442(N) for each shipped administrative object and for each received administrative object. Each administrative event log record may include a header 443a and from 1 to N sub-records 442(J)(1) . . . 442(J)(N). In the preferred embodiment, header 443a may include a site record number field 443A(1), a record length field 443A(2), an administrative object ID field 443A(3), a field 443A(4) specifying a number of events, a validation tag 443A(5) from shipping table 444 or receiving table 446, and a check sum field 443A(6). The number of events specified in field 443A(4) corresponds to the number of sub-records 442(J)(1) . . . 442(J)(N) within the administrative event log record 442(J). Each of these sub-records specifies information about a particular "event" affected or corresponding to the administrative object specified within field 443(A)(3). Administrative events are retained in the administrative event log 442 to permit the

reconstruction (and preparation for construction or processing) of the administrative objects that have been sent from or received by the system. This permits lost administrative objects to be reconstructed at a later time.

Each sub-record may include a sub-record length field 442(J)(1)(a), a data area length field 442(J)(1)(b), an event ID field 442(J)(1)(c), a record type field 442(J)(1)(d), a record ID field 442(J)(1)(e), a data area field 442(J)(1)(f), and a check value field 442(J)(1)(g). The data area 442(J)(1)(f) may be used to indicate which information within secure database 610 is affected by the event specified in the event ID field 442(J)(1)(c), or what new secure database item(s) were added, and may also specify the outcome of the event.

The object registration table 460 in the preferred embodiment includes a record corresponding to each VDE object 300 within object storage (repository) 728. When a new object arrives or is detected (e.g., by redirector 684), a preferred embodiment electronic appliance 600 "registers" the object by creating an appropriate object registration record and storing it in the object registration table 460. In the preferred embodiment, the object registration table stores information that is user-independent, and depends only on the objects that are registered at a given VDE electronic appliance 600. Registration activities

are typically managed by a REGISTER method associated with an object.

In the example, subject table 462 associates users (or groups of users) with registered objects. The example subject table 462 performs the function of an access control list by specifying which users are authorized to access which registered VDE objects 300.

As described above, secure database 610 stores at least one PERC 808 corresponding to each registered VDE object 300. PERCS 808 specify a set of rights that may be exercised to use or access the corresponding VDE object 300. The preferred embodiment allows user to "customize" their access rights by selecting a subset of rights authorized by a corresponding PERC 808 and/or by specifying parameters or choices that correspond to some or all of the rights granted by PERC 808. These user choices are set forth in a user rights table 464 in the preferred embodiment. User rights table (URT) 464 includes URT records, each of which corresponds to a user (or group of users). Each of these URT records specifies user choices for a corresponding VDE object 300. These user choices may, either independently or in combination with a PERC 808, reference one or more methods 1000 for exercising the rights granted to the user by the PERC

808 in a way specified by the choices contained within the URT record.

Figure 30 shows an example of how these various tables may interact with one another to provide a secure database lookup mechanism. Figure 30 shows object registration table 460 as having a plurality of object registration records 460(1), 460(2), . . . These records correspond to VDE objects 300(1), 300(2), . . . stored within object repository 728. Figure 31 shows an example format for an object registration record 460 provided by the preferred embodiment. Object registration record 460(N) may include the following fields:

site record number field 466(1)

object type field 466(2)

creator ID field 466(3)

object ID field 466(4)

a reference field 466(5) that references subject

table 462

an attribute field 466(6)

a minimum registration interval field 466(7)

a tag 466(8) to a subject table record, and

a check value field 466(9).

The site record number field 466(1) specifies the site record number for this object registration record 460(N). In one embodiment of secure database 610, each record stored within

the secure database is identified by a site record number. This site record number may be used as part of a database lookup process in order to keep track of all of the records within the secure database 610.

Object type field 466(2) may specify the type of registered VDE object 300 (e.g., a content object, an administrative object, etc.).

Creator ID field 466(3) in the example may identify the creator of the corresponding VDE object 300.

Object ID field 466(4) in the example uniquely identifies the registered VDE object 300.

Reference field 466(5) in the preferred embodiment identifies a record within the subject table 462. Through use of this reference, electronic appliance 600 may determine all users (or user groups) listed in subject table 462 authorized to access the corresponding VDE object 300. Tag 466(8) is used to validate that the subject table records accessed using field 466(5) is the proper record to be used with the object registration record 460(N).

Attribute field 466(6) may store one or more attributes or attribute flags corresponding to VDE object 300.

Minimum registration interval field 466(7) may specify how often the end user may re-register as a user of the VDE object 300 with a clearinghouse service, VDE administrator, or VDE provider. One reason to prevent frequent re-registration is to foreclose users from reusing budget quantities in traveling objects until a specified amount of time has elapsed. The minimum registration interval field 466(7) may be left unused when the object owner does not wish to restrict re-registration.

Check value field 466(9) contains validation information used for detecting corruption or modification of record 460(N) to ensure security and integrity of the record. In the preferred embodiment, many or all of the fields within record 460(N) (as with other records within the secure database 610) may be fully or partially encrypted and/or contain fields that are stored redundantly in each record (once in unencrypted form and once in encrypted form). Encrypted and unencrypted versions of the same fields may be cross checked at various times to detect corruption or modification of the records.

As mentioned above, reference field 466(5) references subject table 462, and in particular, references one or more

user/object records 460(M) within the subject table. Figure 32 shows an example of a format for a user/object record 462(M) provided by the example. Record 462(M) may include a header 468 and a subject record portion 470. Header 468 may include a field 468(6) referencing a "first" subject record 470 contained within the subject registration table 462. This "first" subject record 470(1) may, in turn, include a reference field 470(5) that references a "next" subject record 470(2) within the subject registration table 462, and so on. This "linked list" structure permits a single object registration record 460(N) to reference to from one to N subject records 470.

Subject registration table header 468 in the example includes a site record number field 468(1) that may uniquely identify the header as a record within secure database 610. Header 468 may also include a creator ID field 468(2) that may be a copy of the content of the object registration table creator ID field 466(3). Similarly, subject registration table header 468 may include an object ID field 468(5) that may be a copy of object ID field 466(4) within object registration table 460. These fields 468(2), 468(5) make user/object registration records explicitly correspond to particular VDE objects 300.

Header 468 may also include a tag 468(7) that permits validation. In one example arrangement, the tag 468(7) within

the user/object registration header 468 may be the same as the tag 466(8) within the object registration record 460(N) that points to the user/object registration header. Correspondence between these tags 468(7) and 466(8) permits validation that the object registration record and user/object registration header match up.

User/object header 468 also includes an original distributor ID field 468(3) indicating the original distributor of the corresponding VDE object 300, and the last distributor ID field 468(4) that indicates the last distributor within the chain of handling of the object prior to its receipt by electronic appliance 600.

Header 468 also includes a tag 468(8) allowing validation between the header and the "first" subject record 470(1) which field 468(6) references

Subject record 470(1) includes a site record number 472(1), a user (or user group) ID field 472(2), a user (or user group) attributes field 472(3), a field 472(4) referencing user rights table 464, a field 472(5) that references to the "next" subject record 470(2) (if there is one), a tag 472(6) used to validate with the header tag 468(8), a tag 472(7) used to validate with a corresponding tag in the user rights table record referenced by field 472(4), a tag 472(9) used to validate with a tag in the "next"

subject record referenced to by field 472(5) and a check value field 472(9).

User or user group ID 472(2) identifies a user or a user group authorized to use the object identified in field 468(5).

Thus, the fields 468(5) and 472(2) together form the heart of the access control list provided by subject table 462. User attributes field 472(3) may specify attributes pertaining to use/access to object 300 by the user or user group specified in fields 472(2).

Any number of different users or user groups may be added to the access control list (each with a different set of attributes 472(3)) by providing additional subject records 470 in the "linked list" structure.

Subject record reference field 472(4) references one or more records within user rights table 464. Figure 33 shows an example of a preferred format for a user rights table record 464(k). User rights record 464(k) may include a URT header 474, a record rights header 476, and a set of user choice records 478. URT header 474 may include a site record number field, a field 474(2) specifying the number of rights records within the URT record 464(k), a field 474(3) referencing a "first" rights record (i.e., to rights record header 476), a tag 474(4) used to validate the lookup from the subject table 462, a tag 474(5) used to

validate the lookup to the rights record header 476, and a check value field 474(6).

Rights record header 476 in the preferred embodiment may include site record number field 476(1), a right ID field 476(2), a field 476(3) referencing the "next" rights record 476(2), a field 476(4) referencing a first set of user choice records 478(1), a tag 476(5) to allow validation with URT header tag 474(5), a tag 476(6) to allow validation with a user choice record tag 478(6), and a check value field 476(7). Right ID field 476(2) may, for example, specify the type of right conveyed by the rights record 476(e.g., right to use, right to distribute, right to read, right to audit, etc.).

The one or more user choice records 478 referenced by rights record header 476 sets forth the user choices corresponding to access and/or use of the corresponding VDE object 300. There will typically be a rights record 476 for each right authorized to the corresponding user or user group. These rights govern use of the VDE object 300 by that user or user group. For instance, the user may have an "access" right, and an "extraction" right, but not a "copy" right. Other rights controlled by rights record 476 (which is derived from PERC 808 using a REGISTER method in the preferred embodiment) include distribution rights, audit rights, and pricing rights. When an

object 300 is registered with the electronic appliance 600 and is registered with a particular user or user group, the user may be permitted to select among various usage methods set forth in PERC 808. For instance, a VDE object 300 might have two required meter methodologies: one for billing purposes, and one for accumulating data concerning the promotional materials used by the user. The user might be given the choice of a variety of meter/billing methods, such as: payment by VISA or MasterCard; choosing between billing based upon the quantity of material retrieved from an information database, based on the time of use, and/or both. The user might be offered a discount on time and/or quantity billing if he is willing to allow certain details concerning his retrieval of content to be provided to third parties (e.g., for demographic purposes). At the time of registration of an object and/or user for the object, the user would be asked to select a particular meter methodology as the "active metering method" for the first acquired meter. A VDE distributor might narrow the universe of available choices for the user to a subset of the original selection array stipulated by PERC 808. These user selection and configuration settings are stored within user choice records 480(1), 480(2), 480(N). The user choice records need not be explicitly set forth within user rights table 464; instead, it is possible for user choice records 480 to refer (e.g., by site reference number) to particular VDE methods and/or information parameterizing those methods. Such reference by user choice

records 480 to method 1000 should be validated by validation tags contained within the user choice records. Thus, user choice records 480 in the preferred embodiment may select one or more methods 1000 for use with the corresponding VDE object 300 (as is shown in Figure 27). These user choice records 480 may themselves fully define the methods 1000 and other information used to build appropriate components assemblies 690 for implementing the methods. Alternatively, the user/object record 462 used to reference the user rights record 464 may also reference the PERC 808 corresponding to VDE object 300 to provide additional information needed to build the component assembly 690 and/or otherwise access the VDE object 300. For example, PERC 808 may be accessed to obtain MDEs 1202 pertaining to the selected methods, private body and/or rights keys for decrypting and/or encrypting object contents, and may also be used to provide a checking capability ensuring that the user rights record conveys only those rights authorized by a current authorization embodied within a PERC.

In one embodiment provided by the present invention, a conventional database engine may be used to store and organize secure database 610, and the encryption layers discussed above may be "on top of" the conventional database structure. However, if such a conventional database engine is unable to organize the records in secure database 610 and support the

security considerations outlined above, then electronic appliance 600 may maintain separate indexing structures in encrypted form. These separate indexing structures can be maintained by SPE 503. This embodiment would require SPE 503 to decrypt the index and search decrypted index blocks to find appropriate "site record IDs" or other pointers. SPE 503 might then request the indicated record from the conventional database engine. If the record ID cannot be checked against a record list, SPE 503 might be required to ask for the data file itself so it can retrieve the desired record. SPE 503 would then perform appropriate authentication to ensure that the file has not been tampered with and that the proper block is returned. SPE 503 should not simply pass the index to the conventional database engine (unless the database engine is itself secure) since this would allow an incorrect record to be swapped for the requested one.

Figure 34 is an example of how the site record numbers described above may be used to access the various data structures within secure database 610. In this example, secure database 610 further includes a site record table 482 that stores a plurality of site record numbers. Site record table 482 may store what is in effect a "master list" of all records within secure database 610. These site record numbers stored by site record table 482 permit any record within secure database 610 to be accessed. Thus, some of the site records within site record table

482 may index records with an object registration table 460, other site record numbers within the site record table may index records within the user/object table 462, still other site record numbers within the site record table may access records within URT 464, and still other site record numbers within the site record table may access PERCs 808. In addition, each of method cores 1000' may also include a site record number so they may be accessed by site record table 482.

Figure 34A shows an example of a site record 482(j) within site record table 482. Site record 482(j) may include a field 484(1) indicating the type of record, a field 484(2) indicating the owner or creator of the record, a "class" field 484(3) and an "instance" field 484(4) providing additional information about the record to which the site record 482(j) points; a specific descriptor field 484(5) indicating some specific descriptor (e.g., object ID) associated with the record; an identification 484(6) of the table or other data structure which the site record references; a reference and/or offset within that data structure indicating where the record begins; a validation tag 484(8) for validating the record being looked up, and a check value field 484(9). Fields 484(6) and 484(7) together may provide the mechanism by which the record referenced to by the site record 484(j) is actually physically located within the secure database 610.

Updating Secure Database 610

Figure 35 show an example of a process 1150 which can be used by a clearinghouse, VDE administrator or other VDE participant to update the secure database 610 maintained by an end user's electronic appliance 600. For example, the process 1500 shown in Figure 35 might be used to collect "audit trail" records within secure database 610 and/or provide new budgets and permissions (e.g., PERCs 808) in response to an end user's request.

Typically, the end user's electronic appliance 600 may initiate communications with a clearinghouse (Block 1152). This contact may, for example, be established automatically or in response to a user command. It may be initiated across the electronic highway 108, or across other communications networks such as a LAN, WAN, two-way cable or using portable media exchange between electronic appliances. The process of exchanging administrative information need not occur in a single "on line" session, but could instead occur over time based on a number of different one-way and/or two-way communications over the same or different communications means. However, the process 1150 shown in Figure 35 is a specific example where the end user's electronic appliance 600 and the other VDE participant (e.g., a clearinghouse) establish a two-way real-time

interactive communications exchange across a telephone line, network, electronic highway 108, etc.

The end user's electronic appliance 600 generally contacts a particular VDE administrator or clearinghouse. The identity of the particular clearinghouse is based on the VDE object 300 the user wishes to access or has already accessed. For example, suppose the user has already accessed a particular VDE object 300 and has run out of budget for further access. The user could issue a request which will cause her electronic appliance 600 to automatically contact the VDE administrator, distributor and/or financial clearinghouse that has responsibility for that particular object. The identity of the appropriate VDE participants to contact is provided in the example by information within UDEs 1200, MDEs 1202, the Object Registration Table 460 and/or Subject Table 462, for example. Electronic appliance 600 may have to contact multiple VDE participants (e.g., to distribute audit records to one participant, obtain additional budgets or other permissions from another participant, etc.). The contact 1152 may in one example be scheduled in accordance with the Figure 27 Shipping Table 444 and the Figure 29 Administrative Event Log 442.

Once contact is established, the end user's electronic appliance and the clearinghouse typically authenticate one

another and agree on a session key to use for the real-time information exchange (Block 1154). Once a secure connection is established, the end user's electronic appliance may determine (e.g., based on Shipping Table 444) whether it has any administrative object(s) containing audit information that it is supposed to send to the clearinghouse (decision Block 1156). Audit information pertaining to several VDE objects 300 may be placed within the same administrative object for transmission, or different administrative objects may contain audit information about different objects. Assuming the end user's electronic appliance has at least one such administrative object to send to this particular clearinghouse ("yes" exit to decision Block 1156), the electronic appliance sends that administrative object to the clearinghouse via the now-established secure real-time communications (Block 1158). In one specific example, a single administrative object may be sent an administrative object containing audit information pertaining to multiple VDE objects, with the audit information for each different object comprising a separate "event" within the administrative object.

The clearinghouse may receive the administrative object and process its contents to determine whether the contents are "valid" and "legitimate." For example, the clearinghouse may analyze the contained audit information to determine whether it indicates misuse of the applicable VDE object 300. The

clearinghouse may, as a result of this analysis, may generate one or more responsive administrative objects that it then sends to the end user's electronic appliance 600 (Block 1160). The end user's electronic appliance 600 may process events that update its secure database 610 and/or SPU 500 contents based on the administrative object received (Block 1162). For example, if the audit information received by the clearinghouse is legitimate, then the clearinghouse may send an administrative object to the end user's electronic appliance 600 requesting the electronic appliance to delete and/or compress the audit information that has been transferred. Alternatively or in addition, the clearinghouse may request additional information from the end-user electronic appliance 600 at this stage (e.g., retransmission of certain information that was corrupted during the initial transmission, transmission of additional information not earlier transmitted, etc.). If the clearinghouse detects misuse based on the received audit information, it may transmit an administrative object that revokes or otherwise modifies the end user's right to further access the associated VDE objects 300.

The clearinghouse may, in addition or alternatively, send an administrative object to the end user's electronic appliance 600 that instructs the electronic appliance to display one or more messages to the user. These messages may inform the user about certain conditions and/or they may request additional

information from the user. For example, the message may instruct the end user to contact the clearinghouse directly by telephone or otherwise to resolve an indicated problem, enter a PIN, or it may instruct the user to contact a new service company to re-register the associated VDE object. Alternatively, the message may tell the end user that she needs to acquire new usage permissions for the object, and may inform the user of cost, status and other associated information.

During the same or different communications exchange, the same or different clearinghouse may handle the end user's request for additional budget and/or permission pertaining to VDE object 300. For example, the end user's electronic appliance 600 may (e.g., in response to a user input request to access a particular VDE object 300) send an administrative object to the clearinghouse requesting budgets and/or other permissions allowing access (Block 1164). As mentioned above, such requests may be transmitted in the form of one or more administrative objects, such as, for example, a single administrative object having multiple "events" associated with multiple requested budgets and/or other permissions for the same or different VDE objects 300. The clearinghouse may upon receipt of such a request, check the end user's credit, financial records, business agreements and/or audit histories to determine whether the requested budgets and/or permissions should be given. The

clearinghouse may, based on this analysis, send one or more responsive administrative objects which cause the end user's electronic appliance 600 to update its secure database in response (Block 1166, 1168). This updating might, for example, comprise replacing an expired PERC 808 with a fresh one, modifying a PERC to provide additional (or lesser) rights, etc. Steps 1164-1168 may be repeated multiple times in the same or different communications session to provide further updates to the end user's secure database 610.

Figure 36 shows an example of how a new record or element may be inserted into secure database 610. The load process 1070 shown in Figure 35 checks each data element or item as it is loaded to ensure that it has not been tampered with, replaced or substituted. In the process 1070 shown in Figure 35, the first step that is performed is to check to see if the current user of electronic appliance 600 is authorized to insert the item into secure database 610 (block 1072). This test may involve, in the preferred embodiment, loading (or using already loaded) appropriate methods 1000 and other data structures such as UDEs 1200 into an SPE 503, which then authenticates user authorization to make the change to secure database 610 (block 1074). If the user is approved as being authorized to make the change to secure database 610, then SPE 503 may check the integrity of the element to be added to the secure database by

decrypting it (block 1076) and determining whether it has become damaged or corrupted (block 1078). The element is checked to ensure that it decrypts properly using a predetermined management file key, and the check value may be validated. In addition, the public and private header ID tags (if present) may be compared to ensure that the proper element has been provided and had not been substituted, and the unique element tag ID compared against the predetermined element tag. If any of these tests fail, the element may be automatically rejected, error corrected, etc. Assuming the element is found to have integrity, SPE 503 may re-encrypt the information (block 1080) using a new key for example (see Figure 37 discussion below). In the same process step an appropriate tag is preferably provided so that the information becomes encrypted within a security wrapper having appropriate tags contained therein (block 1082). SPE 503 may retain appropriate tag information so that it can later validate or otherwise authenticate the item when it is again read from secure database 610 (block 1084). The now-secure element within its security wrapper may then be stored within secure database 610.

Figure 37 shows an example of a process 1050 used in the preferred embodiment database to securely access an item stored in secure database 610. In the preferred embodiment, SPE 503 first accesses and reads in the item from secure database 610

records. SPE 503 reads this information from secure database 610 in encrypted form, and may "unwrap" it (block 1052) by decrypting it (block 1053) based on access keys internally stored within the protected memory of an SPU 500. In the preferred embodiment, this "unwrap" process 1052 involves sending blocks of information to encrypt/decrypt engine 522 along with a management file key and other necessary information needed to decrypt. Decrypt engine 522 may return "plaintext" information that SPE 503 then checks to ensure that the security of the object has not been breached and that the object is the proper object to be used (block 1054). SPE 503 may then check all correlation and access tags to ensure that the read-in element has not been substituted and to guard against other security threats (block 1054). Part of this "checking" process involves checking the tags obtained from the secure database 610 with tags contained within the secure memory or an SPU 500 (block 1056). These tags stored within SPU 500 may be accessed from SPU protected memory (block 1056) and used to check further the now-unwrapped object. Assuming this "checking" process 1054 does not reveal any improprieties (and block 1052 also indicates that the object has not become corrupted or otherwise damaged), SPE 503 may then access or otherwise use the item (block 1058). Once use of the item is completed, SPE 503 may need to store the item back into secure database 610 if it has changed. If the item has changed, SPE 503 will send the item in its changed form to

encrypt/decrypt engine 522 for encryption (block 1060), providing the appropriate necessary information to the encrypt/decrypt engine (e.g., the appropriate same or different management file key and data) so that the object is appropriately encrypted. A unique, new tag and/or encryption key may be used at this stage to uniquely tag and/or encrypt the item security wrapper (block 1062; see also detailed Figure 37 discussion below). SPE 503 may retain a copy of the key and/or tag within a protected memory of SPU 500 (block 1064) so that the SPE can decrypt and validate the object when it is again read from secure database 610.

The keys to decrypt secure database 610 records are, in the preferred embodiment, maintained solely within the protected memory of an SPU 500. Each index or record update that leaves the SPU 500 may be time stamped, and then encrypted with a unique key that is determined by the SPE 503. For example, a key identification number may be placed "in plain view" at the front of the records of secure database 610 so the SPE 503 can determine which key to use the next time the record is retrieved. SPE 503 can maintain the site ID of the record or index, the key identification number associated with it, and the actual keys in the list internal to the SPE. At some point, this internal list may fill up. At this point, SPE 503 may call a maintenance routine that re-encrypts items within secure database 610 containing

changed information. Some or all of the items within the data structure containing changed information may be read in, decrypted, and then re-encrypted with the same key. These items may then be issued the same key identification number. The items may then be written out of SPE 503 back into secure database 610. SPE 503 may then clear the internal list of item IDs and corresponding key identification numbers. It may then begin again the process of assigning a different key and a new key identification number to each new or changed item. By using this process, SPE 503 can protect the data structures (including the indexes) of secure database 610 against substitution of old items and against substitution of indexes for current items. This process also allows SPE 503 to validate retrieved item IDs against the encrypted list of expected IDs.

Figure 38 is a flowchart showing this process in more detail. Whenever a secure database 610 item is updated or modified, a new encryption key can be generated for the updated item. Encryption using a new key is performed to add security and to prevent misuse of backup copies of secure database 610 records. The new encryption key for each updated secure database 610 record may be stored in SPU 500 secure memory with an indication of the secure database record or record(s) to which it applies.

SPE 503 may generate a new encryption/decryption key for each new item it is going to store within secure database 610 (block 1086). SPE 503 may use this new key to encrypt the record prior to storing it in the secure database (block 1088). SPE 503 make sure that it retains the key so that it can later read and decrypt the record. Such decryption keys are, in the preferred embodiment, maintained within protected non-volatile memory (e.g., NVRAM 534b) within SPU 500. Since this protected memory has a limited size, there may not be enough room within the protected memory to store a new key. This condition is tested for by decision block 1090 in the preferred embodiment. If there is not enough room in memory for the new key (or some other event such as the number of keys stored in the memory exceeding a predetermined number, a timer has expired, etc.), then the preferred embodiment handles the situation by re-encrypting other records with secure database 610 with the same new key in order to reduce the number of (or change) encryption/decryption keys in use. Thus, one or more secure database 610 items may be read from the secure database (block 1092), and decrypted using the old key(s) used to encrypt them the last time they were stored. In the preferred embodiment, one or more "old keys" are selected, and all secure database items encrypted using the old key(s) are read and decrypted. These records may now be re-encrypted using the new key that was generated at block 1086 for the new record (block 1094). The old

key(s) used to decrypt the other record(s) may now be removed from the SPU protected memory (block 1096), and the new key stored in its place (block 1097). The old key(s) cannot be removed from secure memory by block 1096 unless SPE 503 is assured that all records within the secure database 610 that were encrypted using the old key(s) have been read by block 1092 and re-encrypted by block 1904 using the new key. All records encrypted (or re-encrypted) using the new key may now be stored in secure database 610 (block 1098). If decision block 1090 determines there is room within the SPU 500 protected memory to store the new key, then the operations of blocks 1092, 1094, 1096 are not needed and SPE 503 may instead simply store the new key within the protected memory (block 1097) and store the new encrypted records into secure database 610 (block 1098).

The security of secure database 610 files may be further improved by segmenting the records into "compartments." Different encryption/decryption keys may be used to protect different "compartments." This strategy can be used to limit the amount of information within secure database 610 that is encrypted with a single key. Another technique for increasing security of secure database 610 may be to encrypt different portions of the same records with different keys so that more than one key may be needed to decrypt those records.

Backup of Secure Database 610

Secure database 610 in the preferred embodiment is backed up at periodic or other time intervals to protect the information the secure database contains. This secure database information may be of substantial value to many VDE participants. Back ups of secure database 610 should occur without significant inconvenience to the user, and should not breach any security.

The need to back up secure database 610 may be checked at power on of electronic appliance 600, when SPE 503 is initially invoked, at periodic time intervals, and if "audit roll up" value or other summary services information maintained by SPE 503 exceeds a user set or other threshold, or triggered by criteria established by one or more content publishers and/or distributors and/or clearinghouse service providers and/or users. The user may be prompted to backup if she has failed to do so by or at some certain point in time or after a certain duration of time or quantity of usage, or the backup may proceed automatically without user intervention.

Referring to Figure 8, backup storage 668 and storage media 670 (e.g., magnetic tape) may be used to store backed up information. Of course, any non-volatile media (e.g., one or more

floppy diskettes, a writable optical diskette, a hard drive, or the like) may be used for backup storage 668.

There are at least two scenarios to backing up secure database 610. The first scenario is "site specific," and uses the security of SPU 500 to support restoration of the backed up information. This first method is used in case of damage to secure database 610 due for example to failure of secondary storage device 652, inadvertent user damage to the files, or other occurrences that may damage or corrupt some or all of secure database 610. This first, site specific scenario of back up assumes that an SPU 500 still functions properly and is available to restore backed up information.

The second back up scenario assumes that the user's SPU 500 is no longer operational and needs to be, or has been, replaced. This second approach permits an authorized VDE administrator or other authorized VDE participant to access the stored back up information in order to prevent loss of critical data and/or assist the user in recovering from the error.

Both of these scenarios are provided by the example of program control steps performed by ROS 602 shown in Figure 39. Figure 39 shows an example back up routine 1250 performed by an electronic appliance 600 to back up secure database 610 (and

other information) onto back up storage 668. Once a back up has been initiated, as discussed above, back up routine 1250 generates one or more back up keys (block 1252). Back up routine 1250 then reads all secure database items, decrypts each item using the original key used to encrypt them before they were stored in secure database 610 (block 1254). Since SPU 500 is typically the only place where the keys for decrypting this information within an instance of secure database 610 are stored, and since one of the scenarios provided by back up routine 1250 is that SPU 500 completely failed or is destroyed, back up routine 1250 performs this reading and decrypting step 1254 so that recovery from a backup is not dependent on knowledge of these keys within the SPU. Instead, back up routine 1250 encrypts each secure database 610 item with a newly generated back up key(s) (block 1256) and writes the encrypted item to back up store 668 (block 1258). This process continues until all items within secure database 610 have been read, decrypted, encrypted with a newly generated back up key(s), and written to the back up store (as tested for by decision block 1260).

The preferred embodiment also reads the summary services audit information stored within the protected memory of SPU 500 by SPE summary services manager 560, encrypts this information with the newly generated back up key(s), and writes

this summary services information to back up store 668 (block 1262).

Finally, back up routine 1250 saves the back up key(s) generated by block 1252 and used to encrypt in blocks 1256, 1262 onto back up store 668. It does this in two secure ways in order to cover both of the restoration scenarios discussed above. Back up routine 1250 may encrypt the back up key(s) (along with other information such as the time of back up and other appropriate information to identify the back up) with a further key or keys such that only SPU 500 can decrypt (block 1264). This encrypted information is then written to back up store 668 (block 1264). For example, this step may include multiple encryptions using one or more public keys with corresponding private keys known only to SPU 500. Alternatively, a second back up key generated by the SPU 500 and kept only in the SPU may be used for the final encryption in place of a public key. Block 1264 preferably includes multiple encryption in order to make it more difficult to attack the security of the back up by "cracking" the encryption used to protect the back up keys. Although block 1262 includes encrypted summary services information on the back up, it preferably does not include SPU device private keys, shared keys, SPU code and other internal security information to prevent this information from ever becoming available to users even in encrypted form.

The information stored by block 1264 is sufficient to allow the same SPU 500 that performed (or at least in part performed) back up routine 1250 to recover the backed up information. However, this information is useless to any device other than that same SPU because only that SPU knows the particular keys used to protect the back up keys. To cover the other possible scenario wherein the SPU 500 fails in a non-recoverable way, back up routine 1250 provides an additional step (block 1266) of saving the back up key(s) under protection of one or more further set of keys that may be read by an authorized VDE administrator. For example, block 1266 may encrypt the back up keys with an "download authorization key" received during initialization of SPU 500 from a VDE administrator. This encrypted version of back up keys is also written to back up store 668 (block 1266). It can be used to support restoration of the back up files in the event of an SPU 500 failure. More specifically, a VDE administrator that knows the download authorization (or other) keys(s) used by block 1266 may be able to recover the back up key(s) in the back up store 668 and proceed to restore the backed up secure database 610 to the same or different electronic appliance 600.

In the preferred embodiment, the information saved by routine 1250 in back up files can be restored only after receiving a back up authorization from an authorized VDE administrator.

In most cases, the restoration process will simply be a restoration of secure database 610 with some adjustments to account for any usage since the back up occurred. This may require the user to contact additional providers to transmit audit and billing data and receive new budgets to reflect activity since the last back up. Current summary services information maintained within SPU 500 may be compared to the summary services information stored on the back up to determine or estimate most recent usage activity.

In case of an SPU 500 failure, an authorized VDE administrator must be contacted to both initialize the replacement SPU 500 and to decrypt the back up files. These processes allow for both SPU failures and upgrades to new SPUs. In the case of restoration, the back up files are used to restore the necessary information to the user's system. In the case of upgrades, the back up files may be used to validate the upgrade process.

The back up files may in some instances be used to transfer management information between electronic appliances 600. However, the preferred embodiment may restrict some or all information from being transportable between electronic appliances with appropriate authorizations. Some or all of the

back up files may be packaged within an administrative object and transmitted for analysis, transportation, or other uses.

As a more detailed example of a need for restoration from back up files, suppose an electronic appliance 600 suffers a hard disk failure or other accident that wipes out or corrupts part or all of the secure database 610, but assume that the SPU 500 is still functional. SPU 500 may include all of the information (e.g., secret keys and the like) it needs to restore the secure database 610. However, ROS 602 may prevent secure database restoration until a restoration authorization is received from a VDE administrator. A restoration authorization may comprise, for example, a "secret value" that must match a value expected by SPE 503. A VDE administrator may, if desired, only provide this restoration authorization after, for example, summary services information stored within SPU 500 is transmitted to the administrator in an administrative object for analysis. In some circumstances, a VDE administrator may require that a copy (partial or complete) of the back up files be transmitted to it within an administrative object to check for indications of fraudulent activities by the user. The restoration process, once authorized, may require adjustment of restored budget records and the like to reflect activity since the last back up, as mentioned above.

Figure 40 is an example of program controlled "restore" routine 1268 performed by electronic appliance 600 to restore secure database 610 based on the back up provided by the routine shown in Figure 38. This restore may be used, for example, in the event that an electronic appliance 600 has failed but can be recovered or "reinitialized" through contact with a VDE administrator for example. Since the preferred embodiment does not permit an SPU 500 to restore from backup unless and until authorized by a VDE administrator, restore routine 1268 begins by establishing a secure communication with a VDE administrator that can authorize the restore to occur (block 1270). Once SPU 500 and the VDE administrator authenticate one another (part of block 1270), the VDE administrator may extract "work in progress" and summary values from the SPU 500's internal non-volatile memory (block 1272). The VDE administrator may use this extracted information to help determine, for example, whether there has been a security violation, and also permits a failed SPU 500 to effectively "dump" its contents to the VDE administrator to permit the VDE administrator to handle the contents. The SPU 500 may encrypt this information and provide it to the VDE administrator packaged in one or more administrative objects. The VDE administrator may then request a copy of some or all of the current backup of secure database 610 from the SPU 500 (block 1274). This information may be packaged by SPU 500 into one or

more administrative objects, for example, and sent to the VDE administrator. Upon receiving the information, the VDE administrator may read the summary services audit information from the backup volume (i.e., information stored by Figure 38 block 1262) to determine the summary values and other information stored at time of backup. The VDE administrator may also determine the time and date the backup was made by reading the information stored by Figure 38 block 1264.

The VDE administrator may at this point restore the summary values and other information within SPU 500 based on the information obtained by block 1272 and from the backup (block 1276). For example, the VDE administrator may reset SPU internal summary values and counters so that they are consistent with the last backup. These values may be adjusted by the VDE administrator based on the "work in progress" recovered by block 1272, the amount of time that has passed since the backup, etc. The goal may typically be to attempt to provide internal SPU values that are equal to what they would have been had the failure not occurred.

The VDE administrator may then authorize SPU 500 to recover its secure database 610 from the backup files (block 1278). This restoration process replaces all secure database 610 records with the records from the backup. The VDE

administrator may adjust these records as needed by passing commands to SPU 500 during or after the restoration process.

The VDE administrator may then compute bills based on the recovered values (block 1280), and perform other actions to recover from SPU downtime (block 1282). Typically, the goal is to bill the user and adjust other VDE 100 values pertaining to the failed electronic appliance 600 for usage that occurred subsequent to the last backup but prior to the failure. This process may involve the VDE administrator obtaining, from other VDE participants, reports and other information pertaining to usage by the electronic appliance prior to its failure and comparing it to the secure database backup to determine which usage and other events are not yet accounted for.

In one alternate embodiment, SPU 500 may have sufficient internal, non-volatile memory to allow it to store some or all of secure database 610. In this embodiment, the additional memory may be provided by additional one or more integrated circuits that can be contained within a secure enclosure, such as a tamper resistant metal container or some form of a chip pack containing multiple integrated circuit components, and which impedes and/or evidences tampering attempts, and/or disables a portion or all of SPU 500 or associated critical key and/or other control information in the event of tampering. The same back up

routine 1250 shown in Figure 38 may be used to back up this type of information, the only difference being that block 1254 may read the secure database item from the SPU internal memory and may not need to decrypt it before encrypting it with the back up key(s).

Event-Driven VDE Processes

As discussed above, processes provided by/under the preferred embodiment rights operating system (ROS) 602 may be "event driven." This "event driven" capability facilitates integration and extendibility.

An "event" is a happening at a point in time. Some examples of "events" are a user striking a key of a keyboard, arrival of a message or an object 300, expiration of a timer, or a request from another process.

In the preferred embodiment, ROS 602 responds to an "event" by performing a process in response to the event. ROS 602 dynamically creates active processes and tasks in response to the occurrence of an event. For example, ROS 602 may create and begin executing one or more component assemblies 690 for performing a process or processes in response to occurrence of an event. The active processes and tasks may terminate once ROS 602 has responded to the event. This ability to dynamically

create (and end) tasks in response to events provides great flexibility, and also permits limited execution resources such as those provided by an SPU 500 to perform a virtually unlimited variety of different processes in different contexts.

Since an "event" may be any type of happening, there are an unlimited number of different events. Thus, any attempt to categorize events into different types will necessarily be a generalization. Keeping this in mind, it is possible to categorize events provided/supported by the preferred embodiment into two broad categories:

- user-initiated events; and
- system-initiated events.

Generally, "user-initiated" events are happenings attributable to a user (or a user application). A common "user-initiated" event is a user's request (e.g., by pushing a keyboard button, or transparently using redirector 684) to access an object 300 or other VDE-protected information.

"System-initiated" events are generally happenings not attributable to a user. Examples of system initiated events include the expiration of a timer indicating that information should be backed to non-volatile memory, receipt of a message

from another electronic appliance 600, and a service call generated by another process (which may have been started to respond to a system-initiated event and/or a user-initiated event).

ROS 602 provided by the preferred embodiment responds to an event by specifying and beginning processes to process the event. These processes are, in the preferred embodiment, based on methods 1000. Since there are an unlimited number of different types of events, the preferred embodiment supports an unlimited number of different processes to process events. This flexibility is supported by the dynamic creation of component assemblies 690 from independently deliverable modules such as method cores 1000', load modules 1100, and data structures such as UDEs 1200. Even though any categorization of the unlimited potential types of processes supported/provided by the preferred embodiment will be a generalization, it is possible to generally classify processes as falling within two categories:

- processes relating to use of VDE protected information;
- and
- processes relating to VDE administration.

"Use" and "Administrative Processes

"Use" processes relate in some way to use of VDE-protected information. Methods 1000 provided by the preferred

embodiment may provide processes for creating and maintaining a chain of control for use of VDE-protected information. One specific example of a "use" type process is processing to permit a user to open a VDE object 300 and access its contents. A method 1000 may provide detailed use-related processes such as, for example, releasing content to the user as requested (if permitted), and updating meters, budgets, audit trails, etc. Use-related processes are often user-initiated, but some use processes may be system-initiated. Events that trigger a VDE use-related process may be called "use events."

An "administrative" process helps to keep VDE 100 working. It provides processing that helps support the transaction management "infrastructure" that keeps VDE 100 running securely and efficiently. Administrative processes may, for example, provide processing relating to some aspect of creating, modifying and/or destroying VDE-protected data structures that establish and maintain VDE's chain of handling and control. For example, "administrative" processes may store, update, modify or destroy information contained within a VDE electronic appliance 600 secure database 610. Administrative processes also may provide communications services that establish, maintain and support secure communications between different VDE electronic appliances 600. Events that trigger administrative processes may be called "administrative events."

Reciprocal Methods

Some VDE processes are paired based on the way they interact together. One VDE process may "request" processing services from another VDE process. The process that requests processing services may be called a "request process." The "request" constitutes an "event" because it triggers processing by the other VDE process in the pair. The VDE process that responds to the "request event" may be called a "response process." The "request process" and "response process" may be called "reciprocal processes."

The "request event" may comprise, for example, a message issued by one VDE node electronic appliance 600 or process for certain information. A corresponding "response process" may respond to the "request event" by, for example, sending the information requested in the message. This response may itself constitute a "request event" if it triggers a further VDE "response process." For example, receipt of a message in response to an earlier-generated request may trigger a "reply process." This "reply process" is a special type of "response process" that is triggered in response to a "reply" from another "response process." There may be any number of "request" and "response" process pairs within a given VDE transaction.

A "request process" and its paired "response process" may be performed on the same VDE electronic appliance 600, or the two processes may be performed on different VDE electronic appliances. Communication between the two processes in the pair may be by way of a secure (VDE-protected) communication, an "out of channel" communication, or a combination of the two.

Figures 41a-41d are a set of examples that show how the chain of handling and control is enabled using "reciprocal methods." A chain of handling and control is constructed, in part, using one or more pairs of "reciprocal events" that cooperate in request-response manner. Pairs of reciprocal events may be managed in the preferred embodiment in one or more "reciprocal methods." As mentioned above, a "reciprocal method" is a method 1000 that can respond to one or more "reciprocal events." Reciprocal methods contain the two halves of a cooperative process that may be securely executed at physically and/or temporally distant VDE nodes. The reciprocal processes may have a flexibly defined information passing protocols and information content structure. The reciprocal methods may, in fact, be based on the same or different method core 1000' operating in the same or different VDE nodes 600. VDE nodes 600A and 600B shown in Figure 41a may be the same physical electronic appliance 600 or may be separate electronic appliances.

Figure 41a is an example of the operation of a single pair of reciprocal events. In VDE node 600A, method 1000a is processing an event that has a request that needs to be processed at VDE node 600B. The method 1000a (e.g., based on a component assembly 690 including its associated load modules 1100 and data) that responds to this "request" event is shown in Figure 41a as 1450. The process 1450 creates a request (1452) and, optionally, some information or data that will be sent to the other VDE node 1000b for processing by a process associated with the reciprocal event. The request and other information may be transmitted by any of the transport mechanisms described elsewhere in this disclosure.

Receipt of the request by VDE node 600b comprises a response event at that node. Upon receipt of the request, the VDE node 600b may perform a "reciprocal" process 1454 defined by the same or different method 1000b to respond to the response event. The reciprocal process 1454 may be based on a component assembly 690 (e.g., one or more load modules 1100, data, and optionally other methods present in the VDE node 600B).

Figure 41b extends the concepts presented in Figure 41a to include a response from VDE node 600B back to VDE node 600A. The process starts as described for Figure 41a through the receipt and processing of the request event and information 1452

by the response process 1454 in VDE node 600B. The response process 1454 may, as part of its processing, cooperate with another request process (1468) to send a response 1469 back to the initiating VDE node 600A. A corresponding reciprocal process 1470 provided by method 1000A may respond to and process this request event 1469. In this manner, two or more VDE nodes 600A, 600B may cooperate and pass configurable information and requests between methods 1000A, 1000B executing in the nodes. The first and second request-response sequences [(1450, 1452, 1454) and (1468, 1469, 1470)] may be separated by temporal and spatial distances. For efficiency, the request (1468) and response (1454) processes may be based on the same method 1000 or they may be implemented as two methods in the same or different method core 1000'. A method 1000 may be parameterized by an "event code" so it may provide different behaviors/results for different events, or different methods may be provided for different events.

Figure 41c shows the extension the control mechanism described in Figures 41a-41b to three nodes (600A, 600B, 600C). Each request-response pair operates in the manner as described for Figure 41b, with several pairs linked together to form a chain of control and handling between several VDE nodes 600A, 600B, 600C. This mechanism may be used to extend the chain of handling and control to an arbitrary number of VDE nodes using

any configuration of nodes. For example, VDE node 600C might communicate directly to VDE node 600A and communicate directly to VDE 600B, which in turn communicates with VDE node 600A. Alternately, VDE node 600C might communicate directly with VDE node 600A, VDE node 600A may communicate with VDE node 600B, and VDE node 600B may communicate with VDE node 600C.

A method 1000 may be parameterized with sets of events that specify related or cooperative functions. Events may be logically grouped by function (e.g., use, distribute), or a set of reciprocal events that specify processes that may operate in conjunction with each other. Figure 41d illustrates a set of "reciprocal events" that support cooperative processing between several VDE nodes 102, 106, 112 in a content distribution model to support the distribution of budget. The chain of handling and control, in this example, is enabled by using a set of "reciprocal events" specified within a BUDGET method. Figure 41d is an example of how the reciprocal event behavior within an example BUDGET method (1510) work in cooperation to establish a chain of handling and control between several VDE nodes. The example BUDGET method 1510 responds to a "use" event 1478 by performing a "use" process 1476 that defines the mechanism by which processes are budgeted. The BUDGET method 1510 might, for example, specify a use process 1476 that compares a

meter count to a budget value and fail the operation if the meter count exceeds the budget value. It might also write an audit trail that describes the results of said BUDGET decisions. Budget method 1510 may respond to a "distribute" event by performing a distribute process 1472 that defines the process and/or control information for further distribution of the budget. It may respond to a "request" event 1480 by performing a request process 1480 that specifies how the user might request use and/or distribution rights from a distributor. It may respond to a "response" event 1482 by performing a response process 1484 that specifies the manner in which a distributor would respond to requests from other users to whom they have distributed some (or all) of their budget to. It may respond to a "reply" event 1474 by performing a reply process 1475 that might specify how the user should respond to message regranting or denying (more) budget.

Control of event processing, reciprocal events, and their associated methods and method components is provided by PERCs 808 in the preferred embodiment. These PERCs (808) might reference administrative methods that govern the creation, modification, and distribution of the data structures and administrative methods that permit access, modification, and further distribution of these items. In this way, each link in the chain of handling and control might, for example, be able to

customize audit information, alter the budget requirements for using the content, and/or control further distribution of these rights in a manner specified by prior members along the distribution chain.

In the example shown in Figure 41d, a distributor at a VDE distributor node (106) might request budget from a content creator at another node (102). This request may be made in the context of a secure VDE communication or it may be passed in an "out-of-channel" communication (e.g. a telephone call or letter). The creator 102 may decide to grant budget to the distributor 106 and processes a distribute event (1452 in BUDGET method 1510 at VDE node 102). A result of processing the distribute event within the BUDGET method might be a secure communication (1454) between VDE nodes 102 and 106 by which a budget granting use and redistribute rights to the distributor 106 may be transferred from the creator 102 to the distributor. The distributor's VDE node 106 may respond to the receipt of the budget information by processing the communication using the reply process 1475B of the BUDGET method 1510. The reply event processing 1475B might, for example, install a budget and PERC 808 within the distributor's VDE 106 node to permit the distributor to access content or processes for which access is controlled at least in part by the budget and/or PERC. At some

point, the distributor 106 may also desire to use the content to which she has been granted rights to access.

After registering to use the content object, the user 112 would be required to utilize an array of "use" processes 1476C to, for example, open, read, write, and/or close the content object as part of the use process.

Once the distributor 106 has used some or all of her budget, she may desire to obtain additional budget. The distributor 106 might then initiate a process using the BUDGET method request process (1480B). Request process 1480B might initiate a communication (1482AB) with the content creator VDE node 102 requesting more budget and perhaps providing details of the use activity to date (e.g., audit trails). The content creator 102 processes the 'get more budget' request event 1482AB using the response process (1484A) within the creator's BUDGET method 1510A. Response process 1484A might, for example, make a determination if the use information indicates proper use of the content, and/or if the distributor is credit worthy for more budget. The BUDGET method response process 1484A might also initiate a financial transaction to transfer funds from the distributor to pay for said use, or use the distribute process 1472A to distribute budget to the distributor 106. A response to the distributor 106 granting more budget (or denying more

budget) might be sent immediately as a response to the request communication 1482AB, or it might be sent at a later time as part of a separate communication. The response communication, upon being received at the distributor's VDE node 106, might be processed using the reply process 1475B within the distributor's copy of the BUDGET method 1510B. The reply process 1475B might then process the additional budget in the same manner as described above.

The chain of handling and control may, in addition to posting budget information, also pass control information that governs the manner in which said budget may be utilized. For example, the control information specified in the above example may also contain control information describing the process and limits that apply to the distributor's redistribution of the right to use the creator's content object. Thus, when the distributor responds to a budget request from a user (a communication between a user at VDE node 112 to the distributor at VDE node 106 similar in nature to the one described above between VDE nodes 106 and 102) using the distribute process 1472B within the distributor's copy of the BUDGET method 1510B, a distribution and request/response/reply process similar to the one described above might be initiated.

Thus, in this example a single method can provide multiple dynamic behaviors based on different "triggering" events. For example, single BUDGET method 1510 might support any or all of the events listed below:

Event Type	Event	Process Description
"Use" Events	use budget	Use budget.
Request Events Processed by User Node Request Process 1480c	request more budget	Request more money for budget.
	request audit by auditor #1	Request that auditor #1 audit the budget use.
	request budget deletion	Request that budget be deleted from system.
	request method updated	Update method used for auditing.
	request to change auditors	Change from auditor 1 to auditor 2, or vice versa.
	request different audit interval	Change time interval between audits.
	request ability to provide budget copies	Request ability to provide copies of a budget.
	request ability to distribute budget	Request ability to distribute a budget to other users.
	request account status	Request information on current status of an account.
	Request New Method	Request new method.
	Request Method Update	Request update of method.
	Request Method Deletion	Request deletion of method.
Response Events Processed by User Node Request Process 1480C	receive more budget	Allocate more money to budget.
	receive method update	Update method.
	receive auditor change	Change from one auditor to another.
	receive change to audit interval	Change interval between audits.

Event Type	Event	Process Description
	receive budget deletion	Delete budget.
	provide audit to auditor #1	Forward audit information to auditor #1.
	provide audit to auditor #2	Forward audit information to auditor #2.
	receive account status	Provide account status.
	Receive New	Receive new budget.
	Receive Method Update	Receive updated information.
	Receive More	Receive more for budget.
	Sent Audit	Send audit information.
	Perform Deletion	Delete information.
"Distribute" Events	Create New	Create new budget.
	Provide More	Provide more for budget.
	Audit	Perform audit.
	Delete	Delete information.
	Reconcile	Reconcile budget and auditing.
	Copy	Copy budget.
	Distribute	Distribute budget.
	Method Modification	Modify method.
	Display Method	Display requested method.
"Request" Events Processed by Distributor Node Request Process 1484B	Delete	Delete information.
	Get New	Get new budget.
	Get More	Get more for budget.
	Get Updated	Get updated information.
	Get Audited	Get audit information.
"Response Events" Processed by Distributor Node Request Process 1484B	Provide New to user	Provide new budget to user.
	Provide More to user	Provide more budget to user.
	Provide Update to user	Provided updated budget to user.

Event Type	Event	Process Description
	Audit user	Audit a specified user.
	Delete user's method	Delete method belonging to user.

Examples of Reciprocal Method Processes

A. BUDGET

Figures 42a, 42b, 42c and 42d, respectively, are flowcharts of example process control steps performed by a representative example of BUDGET method 2250 provided by the preferred embodiment. In the preferred embodiment, BUDGET method 2250 may operate in any of four different modes:

- use (see Figure 42a)
- administrative request (see Figure 42b)
- administrative response (see Figure 42c)
- administrative reply (see Figure 42d).

In general, the "use" mode of BUDGET method 2250 is invoked in response to an event relating to the use of an object or its content. The "administrative request" mode of BUDGET method 2250 is invoked by or on behalf of the user in response to some user action that requires contact with a VDE financial provider, and basically its task is to send an administrative request to the VDE financial provider. The "administrative response" mode of BUDGET method 2250 is performed at the VDE financial provider in response to receipt of an administrative request sent from a VDE node to the VDE financial provider by the

"administrative request" invocation of BUDGET method 2250 shown in Figure 42b. The "administrative response" invocation of BUDGET method 2250 results in the transmission of an administrative object from VDE financial provider to the VDE user node. Finally, the "administrative reply" invocation of BUDGET method 2250 shown in Figure 42d is performed at the user VDE node upon receipt of the administrative object sent by the "administrative response" invocation of the method shown in Figure 42c.

In the preferred embodiment, the same BUDGET method 2250 performs each of the four different step sequences shown in Figures 42a-42d. In the preferred embodiment, different event codes may be passed to the BUDGET method 2250 to invoke these various different modes. Of course, it would be possible to use four separate BUDGET methods instead of a single BUDGET method with four different "dynamic personalities," but the preferred embodiment obtains certain advantages by using the same BUDGET method for each of these four types of invocations.

Looking at Figure 42a, the "use" invocation of BUDGET method 2250 first primes the Budget Audit Trail (blocks 2252, 2254). It then obtains the DTD for the Budget UDE, which it uses to obtain and read the Budget UDE blocks 2256-2262).

BUDGET method 2250 in this "use" invocation may then determine whether a Budget Audit date has expired, and terminate if it has ("yes" exit to decision block 2264; blocks 2266, 2268). So long as the Budget Audit date has not expired, the method may then update the Budget using the atomic element and event counts (and possibly other information) (blocks 2270, 2272), and may then save a Budget User Audit record in a Budget Audit Trail UDE (blocks 2274, 2276) before terminating (at terminate point 2278).

Looking at Figure 42b, the first six steps (blocks 2280-2290) may be performed by the user VDE node in response to some user action (e.g., request to access new information, request for a new budget, etc.). This "administrative request" invocation of BUDGET method 2250 may prime an audit trail (blocks 2280, 2282). The method may then place a request for administrative processing of an appropriate Budget onto a request queue (blocks 2284, 2286). Finally, the method may save appropriate audit trail information (blocks 2288, 2290). Sometime later, the user VDE node may prime a communications audit trail (blocks 2292, 2294), and may then write a Budget Administrative Request into an administrative object (block 2296). This step may obtain information from the secure database as needed from such sources such as, for example, Budget UDE; Budget Audit Trail

UDE(s); and Budget Administrative Request Record(s) (block 2298).

Block 2296 may then communicate the administrative object to a VDE financial provider, or alternatively, block 2296 may pass administrative object to a separate communications process or method that arranges for such communications to occur. If desired, method 2250 may then save a communications audit trail (blocks 2300, 2302) before terminating (at termination point 2304).

Figure 42c is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by the example of BUDGET method 2250 provided by the preferred embodiment operating in an "administrative response" mode. Steps shown in Figure 42c would, for example, be performed by a VDE financial provider who has received an administrative object containing a Budget administrative request as created (and communicated to a VDE administrator for example) by Figure 42b (block 2296).

Upon receiving the administrative object, BUDGET method 2250 at the VDE financial provider site may prime a budget communications and response audit trail (blocks 2306, 2308), and may then unpack the administrative object and retrieve the budget request(s), audit trail(s) and record(s) it

contains (block 2310). This information retrieved from the administrative object may be written by the VDE financial provider into its secure database (block 2312). The VDE financial provider may then retrieve the budget request(s) and determine the response method it needs to execute to process the request (blocks 2314, 2316). BUDGET method 2250 may send the event(s) contained in the request record(s) to the appropriate response method and may generate response records and response requests based on the RESPONSE method (block 2318). The process performed by block 2318 may satisfy the budget request by writing appropriate new response records into the VDE financial provider's secure database (block 2320). BUDGET method 2250 may then write these Budget administrative response records into an administrative object (blocks 2322, 2324), which it may then communicate back to the user node that initiated the budget request. BUDGET method 2250 may then save communications and response processing audit trail information into appropriate audit trail UDE(s) (blocks 2326, 2328) before terminating (at termination point 2330).

Figure 42d is a flowchart of an example of program control steps performed by a representative example of BUDGET method 2250 operating in an "administrative reply" mode. Steps shown in Figure 42d might be performed, for example, by a VDE user node upon receipt of an administrative object containing budget-

related information. BUDGET method 2250 may first prime a Budget administrative and communications audit trail (blocks 2332, 2334). BUDGET method 2250 may then extract records and requests from a received administrative object and write the reply record to the VDE secure database (blocks 2336, 2338). The VDE user node may then save budget administrative and communications audit trail information in an appropriate audit trail UDE(s) (blocks 2340, 2341).

Sometime later, the VDE user node may retrieve the reply record from the secure database and determine what method is required to process it (blocks 2344, 2346). The VDE user node may, optionally, prime an audit trail (blocks 2342, 2343) to record the results of the processing of the reply event. The BUDGET method 2250 may then send event(s) contained in the reply record(s) to the REPLY method, and may generate/update the secure database records as necessary to, for example, insert new budget records, delete old budget records and/or apply changes to budget records (blocks 2348, 2350). BUDGET method 2250 may then delete the reply record from the secure data base (blocks 2352, 2353) before writing the audit trail (if required) (blocks 2354m 2355) terminating (at terminate point 2356).

B. REGISTER

Figures 43a-43d are flowcharts of an example of program control steps performed by a representative example of a REGISTER method 2400 provided by the preferred embodiment. In this example, the REGISTER method 2400 performs the example steps shown in Figure 43a when operating in a "use" mode, performs the example steps shown in Figure 43b when operating in an "administrative request" mode, performs the steps shown in Figure 43c when operating in an "administrative response" mode, and performs the steps shown in Figure 43d when operating in an "administrative reply" mode.

The steps shown in Figure 43a may be, for example, performed at a user VDE node in response to some action by or on behalf of the user. For example the user may ask to access an object that has not yet been (or is not now) properly registered to her. In response to such a user request, the REGISTER method 2400 may prime a Register Audit Trail UDE (blocks 2402, 2404) before determining whether the object being requested has already been registered (decision block 2406). If the object has already been registered ("yes" exit to decision block 2406), the REGISTER method may terminate (at termination point 2408). If the object is not already registered ("no" exit to decision block 2406), then REGISTER method 2400 may access the VDE node

secure database PERC 808 and/or Register MDE (block 2410). REGISTER method 2400 may extract an appropriate Register Record Set from this PERC 808 and/or Register MDE (block 2412), and determine whether all of the required elements are present that are needed to register the object (decision block 2414). If some piece(s) is missing ("no" exit to decision block 2414), REGISTER method 2400 may queue a Register request record to a communication manager and then suspend the REGISTER method until the queued request is satisfied (blocks 2416, 2418). Block 2416 may have the effect of communicating a register request to a VDE distributor, for example. When the request is satisfied and the register request record has been received (block 2420), then the test of decision block 2414 is satisfied ("yes" exit to decision block 2414), and REGISTER method 2400 may proceed. At this stage, the REGISTER method 2400 may allow the user to select Register options from the set of method options allowed by PERC 808 accessed at block 2410 (block 2422). As one simple example, the PERC 808 may permit the user to pay by VISA or MasterCard but not by American Express; block 2422 may display a prompt asking the user to select between paying using her VISA card and paying using her MasterCard (block 2424). The REGISTER method 2400 preferably validates the user selected registration options and requires the user to select different options if the initial user options were invalid (block 2426, "no" exit to decision block 2428).

Once the user has made all required registration option selections and those selections have been validated ("yes" exit to decision block 2428), the REGISTER method 2400 may write an User Registration Table (URT) corresponding to this object and this user which embodies the user registration selections made by the user along with other registration information required by PERC 808 and/or the Register MDE (blocks 2430, 2432). REGISTER method 2400 may then write a Register audit record into the secure database (blocks 2432, 2434) before terminating (at terminate point 2436).

Figure 43b shows an example of an "administrative request" mode of REGISTER method 2400. This Administrative Request Mode may occur on a VDE user system to generate an appropriate administrative object for communication to a VDE distributor or other appropriate VDE participant requesting registration information. Thus, for example, the steps shown in Figure 43b may be performed as part of the "queue register request record" block 2416 shown in Figure 43a. To make a Register administrative request, REGISTER method 2400 may first prime a communications audit trail (blocks 2440, 2442), and then access the secure database to obtain data about registration (block 2444). This secure database access may, for example, allow the owner and/or publisher of the object being registered to find out demographic, user or other information about the user.

As a specific example, suppose that the object being registered is a spreadsheet software program. The distributor of the object may want to know what other software the user has registered. For example, the distributor may be willing to give preferential pricing if the user registers a "suite" of multiple software products distributed by the same distributor. Thus, the sort of information solicited by a "user registration" card enclosed with most standard software packages may be solicited and automatically obtained by the preferred embodiment at registration time. In order to protect the privacy rights of the user, REGISTER method 2400 may pass such user-specific data through a privacy filter that may be at least in part customized by the user so the user can prevent certain information from being revealed to the outside world (block 2446). The REGISTER method 2400 may write the resulting information along with appropriate Register Request information identifying the object and other appropriate parameters into an administrative object (blocks 2448, 2450). REGISTER method 2400 may then pass this administrative object to a communications handler. REGISTER method 2400 may then save a communications audit trail (blocks 2452, 2454) before terminating (at terminate point 2456).

Figure 43c includes REGISTER method 2400 steps that may be performed by a VDE distributor node upon receipt of Register Administrative object sent by block 2448, Figure 43b.

REGISTER method 2400 in this "administrative response" mode may prime appropriate audit trails (blocks 2460, 2462), and then may unpack the received administrative object and write the associated register request(s) configuration information into the secure database (blocks 2464, 2466). REGISTER method 2400 may then retrieve the administrative request from the secure database and determine which response method to run to process the request (blocks 2468, 2470). If the user fails to provide sufficient information to register the object, REGISTER method 2400 may fail (blocks 2472, 2474). Otherwise, REGISTER method 2400 may send event(s) contained in the appropriate request record(s) to the appropriate response method, and generate and write response records and response requests (e.g., PERC(s) and/or UDEs) to the secure database (blocks 2476, 2478). REGISTER method 2400 may then write the appropriate Register administrative response record into an administrative object (blocks 2480, 2482). Such information may include, for example, one or more replacement PERC(s) 808, methods, UDE(s), etc. (block 2482). This enables, for example, a distributor to distribute limited right permissions giving users only enough information to register an object, and then later, upon registration, replacing the limited right permissions with wider permissioning scope granting the user more complete access to the objects. REGISTER method 2400 may then save

the communications and response processing audit trail (blocks 2484, 2486), before terminating (at terminate point 2488).

Figure 43d shows steps that may be performed by the VDE user node upon receipt of the administrative object generated/transmitted by Figure 43c block 2480. The steps shown in Figure 43d are very similar to those shown in Figure 42d for the BUDGET method administrative reply process.

C. AUDIT

Figures 44a-44c are flowcharts of examples of program control steps performed by a representative example of an AUDIT method 2520 provided by the preferred embodiment. As in the examples above, the AUDIT method 2520 provides three different operational modes in this preferred embodiment example: Figure 44a shows the steps performed by the AUDIT method in an "administrative request" mode; Figure 44b shows steps performed by the method in the "administrative response" mode; and Figure 44c shows the steps performed by the method in an "administrative reply" mode.

The AUDIT method 2520 operating in the "administrative request" mode as shown in Figure 44a is typically performed, for example, at a VDE user node based upon some request by or on behalf of the user. For example, the user may have requested an

audit, or a timer may have expired that initiates communication of audit information to a VDE content provider or other VDE participant. In the preferred embodiment, different audits of the same overall process may be performed by different VDE participants. A particular "audit" method 2520 invocation may be initiated for any one (or all) of the involved VDE participants. Upon invocation of AUDIT method 2520, the method may prime an audit administrative audit trail (thus, in the preferred embodiment, the audit processing may itself be audited) (blocks 2522, 2524). The AUDIT method 2520 may then queue a request for administrative processing (blocks 2526, 2528), and then may save the audit administrative audit trail in the secure database (blocks 2530, 2532). Sometime later, AUDIT method 2520 may prime a communications audit trail (blocks 2534, 2536), and may then write Audit Administrative Request(s) into one or more administrative object(s) based on specific UDE, audit trail UDE(s), and/or administrative record(s) stored in the secure database (blocks 2538, 2540). The AUDIT method 2520 may then save appropriate information into the communications audit trail (blocks 2542, 2544) before terminating (at terminate point 2546).

Figure 44b shows example steps performed by a VDE content provider, financial provider or other auditing VDE node upon receipt of the administrative object generated and

communicated by Figure 44a block 2538. The AUDIT method 2520 in this "administrative response" mode may first prime an Audit communications and response audit trail (blocks 2550, 2552), and may then unpack the received administrative object and retrieve its contained Audit request(s) audit trail(s) and audit record(s) for storage into the secured database (blocks 2554, 2556). AUDIT method 2520 may then retrieve the audit request(s) from the secure database and determine the response method to run to process the request (blocks 2558, 2560). AUDIT method 2520 may at this stage send event(s) contained in the request record(s) to the appropriate response method, and generate response record(s) and requests based on this method (blocks 2562, 2564). The processing block 2562 may involve a communication to the outside world.

For example, AUDIT method 2520 at this point could call an external process to perform, for example, an electronic funds transfer against the user's bank account or some other bank account. The AUDIT administrative response can, if desired, call an external process that interfaces VDE to one or more existing computer systems. The external process could be passed the user's account number, PIN, dollar amount, or any other information configured in, or associated with, the VDE audit trail being processed. The external process can communicate with non-VDE hosts and use the information passed to it as part of

these communications. For example, the external process could generate automated clearinghouse (ACH) records in a file for submittal to a bank. This mechanism would provide the ability to automatically credit or debit a bank account in any financial institution. The same mechanism could be used to communicate with the existing credit card (e.g. VISA) network by submitting VDE based charges against the charge account.

Once the appropriate Audit response record(s) have been generated, AUDIT method 2520 may write an Audit administrative record(s) into an administrative object for communication back to the VDE user node that generated the Audit request (blocks 2566, 2568). The AUDIT method 2520 may then save communications and response processing audit information in appropriate audit trail(s) (blocks 2570, 2572) before terminating (at terminate point 2574).

Figure 44c shows an example of steps that may be performed by the AUDIT method 2520 back at the VDE user node upon receipt of the administrative object generated and sent by Figure 44b, block 2566. The steps 2580-2599 shown in Figure 44c are similar to the steps shown in Figure 43d for the REGISTER method 2400 in the "administrative reply" mode. Briefly, these steps involve receiving and extracting appropriate response records from the administrative object (block 2584), and

then processing the received information appropriately to update secure database records and perform any other necessary actions (blocks 2595, 2596).

Examples of Event-Driven Content-Based Methods

VDE methods 1000 are designed to provide a very flexible and highly modular approach to secure processing. A complete VDE process to service a "use event" may typically be constructed as a combination of methods 1000. As one example, the typical process for reading content or other information from an object 300 may involve the following methods:

- an EVENT method
- a METER method
- a BILLING method
- a BUDGET method.

Figure 45 is an example of a sequential series of methods performed by VDE 100 in response to an event. In this example, when an event occurs, an EVENT method 402 may "qualify" the event to determine whether it is significant or not. Not all events are significant. For example, if the EVENT method 1000 in a control process dictates that usage is to be metered based upon number of pages read, then user request "events" for reading less than a page of information may be ignored. In another example, if a system event represents a request to read a certain number

of bytes, and the EVENT method 1000 is part of a control process designed to meter paragraphs, then the EVENT method may evaluate the read request to determine how many paragraphs are represented in the bytes requested. This process may involve mapping to "atomic elements" to be discussed in more detail below.

EVENT method 402 filters out events that are not significant with regard to the specific control method involved. EVENT method 402 may pass on qualified events to a METER process 1404, which meters or discards the event based on its own particular criteria.

In addition, the preferred embodiment provides an optimization called "precheck." EVENT method/process 402 may perform this "precheck" based on metering, billing and budget information to determine whether processing based on an event will be allowed. Suppose, for example, that the user has already exceeded her budget with respect to accessing certain information content so that no further access is permitted. Although BUDGET method 408 could make this determination, records and processes performed by BUDGET method 404 and/or BILLING method 406 might have to be "undone" to, for example, prevent the user from being charged for an access that was actually denied. It may be more efficient to perform a "precheck"

within EVENT method 402 so that fewer transactions have to be "undone."

METER method 404 may store an audit record in a meter "trail" UDE 1200, for example, and may also record information related to the event in a meter UDE 1200. For example, METER method 404 may increment or decrement a "meter" value within a meter UDE 1200 each time content is accessed. The two different data structures (meter UDE and meter trail UDE) may be maintained to permit record keeping for reporting purposes to be maintained separately from record keeping for internal operation purposes, for example.

Once the event is metered by METER method 404, the metered event may be processed by a BILLING method 406. BILLING method 406 determines how much budget is consumed by the event, and keeps records that are useful for reconciliation of meters and budgets. Thus, for example, BILLING method 406 may read budget information from a budget UDE, record billing information in a billing UDE, and write one or more audit records in a billing trail UDE. While some billing trail information may duplicate meter and/or budget trail information, the billing trail information is useful, for example, to allow a content creator 102 to expect a payment of a certain size, and serve as a reconciliation check to reconcile meter trail information sent to

creator 102 with budget trail information sent to, for example, an independent budget provider.

BILLING method 406 may then pass the event on to a BUDGET method 408. BUDGET method 408 sets limits and records transactional information associated with those limits. For example, BUDGET method 408 may store budget information in a budget UDE, and may store an audit record in a budget trail UDE. BUDGET method 408 may result in a "budget remaining" field in a budget UDE being decremented by an amount specified by BILLING method 406.

The information content may be released, or other action taken, once the various methods 402, 404, 406, 408 have processed the event.

As mentioned above, PERCs 808 in the preferred embodiment may be provided with "control methods" that in effect "oversee" performance of the other required methods in a control process. Figure 46 shows how the required methods/processes 402, 404, 406, and 408 of Figure 45 can be organized and controlled by a control method 410. Control method 410 may call, dispatch events, or otherwise invoke the other methods 402, 404, 406, 408 and otherwise supervise the processing performed in response to an "event."

Control methods operate at the level of control sets 906 within PERCs 808. They provide structure, logic, and flow of control between disparate acquired methods 1000. This mechanism permits the content provider to create any desired chain of processing, and also allows the specific chain of processing to be modified (within permitted limits) by downstream redistributors. This control structure concept provides great flexibility.

Figure 47 shows an example of an "aggregate" method 412 which collects METER method 404, BUDGET method 406 and BILLING method 408 into an "aggregate" processing flow. Aggregate method 412 may, for example, combine various elements of metering, budgeting and billing into a single method 1000. Aggregate method 412 may provide increased efficiency as a result of processing METER method 404, BUDGET method 406 and BILLING method 408 aggregate, but may decrease flexibility because of decreased modularity.

Many different methods can be in effect simultaneously. Figure 48 shows an example of preferred embodiment event processing using multiple METER methods 404 and multiple BUDGET methods 1408. Some events may be subject to many different required methods operating independently or cumulatively. For example, in the example shown in Figure 48,

meter method 404a may maintain meter trail and meter information records that are independent from the meter trail and meter information records maintained by METER method 404b. Similarly, BUDGET method 408a may maintain records independently of those records maintained by BUDGET method 408b. Some events may bypass BILLING method 408 while nevertheless being processed by meter method 404a and BUDGET method 408a. A variety of different variations are possible.

REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF VDE METHODS

Although methods 1000 can have virtually unlimited variety and some may even be user-defined, certain basic "use" type methods are preferably used in the preferred embodiment to control most of the more fundamental object manipulation and other functions provided by VDE 100. For example, the following high level methods would typically be provided for object manipulation:

- OPEN method
- READ method
- WRITE method
- CLOSE method.

An OPEN method is used to control opening a container so its contents may be accessed. A READ method is used to control

the access to contents in a container. A WRITE method is used to control the insertion of contents into a container. A CLOSE method is used to close a container that has been opened.

Subsidiary methods are provided to perform some of the steps required by the OPEN, READ, WRITE and/or CLOSE methods. Such subsidiary methods may include the following:

- ACCESS method
- PANIC method
- ERROR method
- DECRYPT method
- ENCRYPT method
- DESTROY content method
- INFORMATION method
- OBSCURE method
- FINGERPRINT method
- EVENT method.
- CONTENT method
- EXTRACT method
- EMBED method
- METER method
- BUDGET method
- REGISTER method
- BILLING method
- AUDIT method

An ACCESS method may be used to physically access content associated with an opened container (the content can be anywhere). A PANIC method may be used to disable at least a portion of the VDE node if a security violation is detected. An ERROR method may be used to handle error conditions. A DECRYPT method is used to decrypt encrypted information. An ENCRYPT method is used to encrypt information. A DESTROY content method is used to destroy the ability to access specific content within a container. An INFORMATION method is used to provide public information about the contents of a container. An OBSCURE method is used to devalue content read from an opened container (e.g., to write the word "SAMPLE" over a displayed image). A FINGERPRINT method is used to mark content to show who has released it from the secure container. An event method is used to convert events into different events for response by other methods.

Open

Figure 49 is a flowchart of an example of preferred embodiment process control steps for an example of an OPEN method 1500. Different OPEN methods provide different detailed steps. However, the OPEN method shown in Figure 49 is a representative example of a relatively full-featured "open" method provided by the preferred embodiment. Figure 49 shows a macroscopic view of the OPEN method. Figures 49a-49f are

together an example of detailed program controlled steps performed to implement the method shown in Figure 49.

The OPEN method process starts with an "open event." This open event may be generated by a user application, an operating system intercept or various other mechanisms for capturing or intercepting control. For example, a user application may issue a request for access to a particular content stored within the VDE container. As another example, another method may issue a command.

In the example shown, the open event is processed by a control method 1502. Control method 1502 may call other methods to process the event. For example, control method 1502 may call an EVENT method 1504, a METER method 1506, a BILLING method 1508, and a BUDGET method 1510. Not all OPEN control methods necessarily call of these additional methods, but the OPEN method 1500 shown in Figure 49 is a representative example.

Control method 1502 passes a description of the open event to EVENT method 1504. EVENT method 1504 may determine, for example, whether the open event is permitted and whether the open event is significant in the sense that it needs to be processed by METER method 1506, BILLING method 1508,

and/or BUDGET method 1510. EVENT method 1504 may maintain audit trail information within an audit trail UDE, and may determine permissions and significance of the event by using an Event Method Data Element (MDE). EVENT method 1504 may also map the open event into an "atomic element" and count that may be processed by METER method 1506, BILLING method 1508, and/or BUDGET method 1510.

In OPEN method 1500, once EVENT method 1504 has been called and returns successfully, control method 1502 then may call METER method 1506 and pass the METER method, the atomic element and count returned by EVENT method 1504. METER method 1506 may maintain audit trail information in a METER method Audit Trail UDE, and may also maintain meter information in a METER method UDE. In the preferred embodiment, METER method 1506 returns a meter value to control method 1502 assuming successful completion.

In the preferred embodiment, control method 1502 upon receiving an indication that METER method 1506 has completed successfully, then calls BILLING method 1508. Control method 1502 may pass to BILLING method 1508 the meter value provided by METER method 1506. BILLING method 1508 may read and update billing information maintained in a BILLING method map MDE, and may also maintain and update audit trail

in a BILLING method Audit Trail UDE. BILLING method 1508 may return a billing amount and a completion code to control method 1502.

Assuming BILLING method 1508 completes successfully, control method 1502 may pass the billing value provided by BILLING method 1508 to BUDGET method 1510. BUDGET method 1510 may read and update budget information within a BUDGET method UDE, and may also maintain audit trail information in a BUDGET method Audit Trail UDE. BUDGET method 1510 may return a budget value to control method 1502, and may also return a completion code indicating whether the open event exceeds the user's budget (for this type of event).

Upon completion of BUDGET method 1510, control method 1502 may create a channel and establish read/use control information in preparation for subsequent calls to the READ method.

Figures 49a-49f are a more detailed description of the OPEN method 1500 example shown in Figure 49. Referring to Figure 49a, in response to an open event, control method 1502 first may determine the identification of the object to be opened and the identification of the user that has requested the object to be opened (block 1520). Control method 1502 then determines

whether the object to be opened is registered for this user (decision block 1522). It makes this determination at least in part in the preferred embodiment by reading the PERC 808 and the User Rights Table (URT) element associated with the particular object and particular user determined by block 1520 (block 1524). If the user is not registered for this particular object ("no" exit to decision block 1522), then control method 1502 may call the REGISTER method for the object and restart the OPEN method 1500 once registration is complete (block 1526). The REGISTER method block 1526 may be an independent process and may be time independent. It may, for example, take a relatively long time to complete the REGISTER method (say if the VDE distributor or other participant responsible for providing registration wants to perform a credit check on the user before registering the user for this particular object).

Assuming the proper URT for this user and object is present such that the object is registered for this user ("yes" exit to decision block 1522), control method 1502 may determine whether the object is already open for this user (decision block 1528). This test may avoid creating a redundant channel for opening an object that is already open. Assuming the object is not already open ("no" exit to decision block 1528), control method 1502 creates a channel and binds appropriate open control elements to it (block 1530). It reads the appropriate open control

elements from the secure database (or the container, such as, for example, in the case of a travelling object), and "binds" or "links" these particular appropriate control elements together in order to control opening of the object for this user. Thus, block 1530 associates an event with one or more appropriate method core(s), appropriate load modules, appropriate User Data Elements, and appropriate Method Data Elements read from the secure database (or the container) (block 1532). At this point, control method 1502 specifies the open event (which started the OPEN method to begin with), the object ID and user ID (determined by block 1520), and the channel ID of the channel created by block 1530 to subsequent EVENT method 1504, METER method 1506, BILLING method 1508 and BUDGET method 1510 to provide a secure database "transaction" (block 1536). Before doing so, control method 1502 may prime an audit process (block 1533) and write audit information into an audit UDE (block 1534) so a record of the transaction exists even if the transaction fails or is interfered with.

The detail steps performed by EVENT method 1504 are set forth on Figure 49b. EVENT method 1504 may first prime an event audit trail if required (block 1538) which may write to an EVENT Method Audit Trail UDE (block 1540). EVENT method 1504 may then perform the step of mapping the open event to an atomic element number and event count using a map MDE (block 1542). The EVENT method map MDE may be read from the

secure database (block 1544). This mapping process performed by block 1542 may, for example, determine whether or not the open event is meterable, billable, or budgetable, and may transform the open event into some discrete atomic element for metering, billing and/or budgeting. As one example, block 1542 might perform a one-to-one mapping between open events and "open" atomic elements, or it may only provide an open atomic element for every fifth time that the object is opened. The map block 1542 preferably returns the open event, the event count, the atomic element number, the object ID, and the user ID. This information may be written to the EVENT method Audit Trail UDE (block 1546, 1548). In the preferred embodiment, a test (decision block 1550) is then performed to determine whether the EVENT method failed. Specifically, decision block 1550 may determine whether an atomic element number was generated. If no atomic element number was generated (e.g., meaning that the open event is not significant for processing by METER method 1506, BILLING method 1508 and/or BUDGET method 1510), then EVENT method 1504 may return a "fail" completion code to control method 1502 ("no" exit to decision block 1550).

Control method 1502 tests the completion code returned by EVENT method 1504 to determine whether it failed or was successful (decision block 1552). If the EVENT method failed ("no" exit to decision block 1552), control method 1502 may "roll

back" the secure database transaction (block 1554) and return itself with an indication that the OPEN method failed (block 1556). In this context, "rolling back" the secure database transaction means, for example, "undoing" the changes made to audit trail UDE by blocks 1540, 1548. However, this "roll back" performed by block 1554 in the preferred embodiment does not "undo" the changes made to the control method audit UDE by blocks 1532, 1534.

Assuming the EVENT method 1504 completed successfully, control method 1502 then calls the METER method 1506 shown on Figure 49c. In the preferred embodiment, METER method 1506 primes the meter audit trail if required (block 1558), which typically involves writing to a METER method audit trail UDE (block 1560). METER method 1506 may then read a METER method UDE from the secure database (block 1562), modify the meter UDE by adding an appropriate event count to the meter value contained in the meter UDE (block 1564), and then writing the modified meter UDE back to the secure database (block 1562). In other words, block 1564 may read the meter UDE, increment the meter count it contains, and write the changed meter UDE back to the secure database. In the preferred embodiment, METER method 1506 may then write meter audit trail information to the METER method audit trail UDE if required (blocks 1566, 1568). METER method 1506

preferably next performs a test to determine whether the meter increment succeeded (decision block 1570). METER method 1506 returns to control method 1502 with a completion code (e.g., succeed or fail) and a meter value determined by block 1564.

Control method 1502 tests whether the METER method succeeded by examining the completion code, for example (decision block 1572). If the METER method failed ("no" exit to decision block 1572), then control method 1502 "rolls back" a secure database transaction (block 1574), and returns with an indication that the OPEN method failed (block 1576). Assuming the METER method succeeded ("yes" exit to decision block 1572), control method 1502 calls the BILLING method 1508 and passes it the meter value provided by METER method 1506.

An example of steps performed by BILLING method 1508 is set forth in Figure 49d. BILLING method 1508 may prime a billing audit trail if required (block 1578) by writing to a BILLING method Audit Trail UDE within the secure database (block 1580). BILLING method 1508 may then map the atomic element number, count and meter value to a billing amount using a BILLING method map MDE read from the secure database (blocks 1582, 1584). Providing an independent BILLING method map MDE containing, for example, price list information, allows separately deliverable pricing for the billing process. The

resulting billing amount generated by block 1582 may be written to the BILLING method Audit Trail UDE (blocks 1586, 1588), and may also be returned to control method 1502. In addition, BILLING method 1508 may determine whether a billing amount was properly selected by block 1582 (decision block 1590). In this example, the test performed by block 1590 generally requires more than mere examination of the returned billing amount, since the billing amount may be changed in unpredictable ways as specified by BILLING method map MDE. Control then returns to control method 1502, which tests the completion code provided by BILLING method 1508 to determine whether the BILLING method succeeded or failed (block 1592). If the BILLING method failed ("no" exit to decision block 1592), control method 1502 may "roll back" the secure database transaction (block 1594), and return an indication that the OPEN method failed (block 1596). Assuming the test performed by decision block 1592 indicates that the BILLING method succeeded ("yes" exit to decision block 1592), then control method 1502 may call BUDGET method 1510.

Other BILLING methods may use site, user and/or usage information to establish, for example, pricing information. For example, information concerning the presence or absence of an object may be used in establishing "suite" purchases, competitive discounts, etc. Usage levels may be factored into a BILLING

method to establish price breaks for different levels of usage. A currency translation feature of a BILLING method may allow purchases and/or pricing in many different currencies. Many other possibilities exist for determining an amount of budget consumed by an event that may be incorporated into BILLING methods.

An example of detailed control steps performed by BUDGET method 1510 is set forth in Figure 49e. BUDGET method 1510 may prime a budget audit trail if required by writing to a budget trail UDE (blocks 1598, 1600). BUDGET method 1510 may next perform a billing operation by adding a billing amount to a budget value (block 1602). This operation may be performed, for example, by reading a BUDGET method UDE from the secure database, modifying it, and writing it back to the secure database (block 1604). BUDGET method 1510 may then write the budget audit trail information to the BUDGET method Audit Trail UDE (blocks 1606, 1608). BUDGET method 1510 may finally, in this example, determine whether the user has run out of budget by determining whether the budget value calculated by block 1602 is out of range (decision block 1610). If the user has run out of budget ("yes" exit to decision block 1610), the BUDGET method 1510 may return a "fail completion" code to control method 1502. BUDGET method 1510 then returns to control method 1502, which tests whether the BUDGET method

completion code was successful (decision block 1612). If the BUDGET method failed ("no" exit to decision block 1612), control method 1502 may "roll back" the secure database transaction and itself return with an indication that the OPEN method failed (blocks 1614, 1616). Assuming control method 1502 determines that the BUDGET method was successful, the control method may perform the additional steps shown on Figure 49f. For example, control method 1502 may write an open audit trail if required by writing audit information to the audit UDE that was primed at block 1532 (blocks 1618, 1620). Control method 1502 may then establish a read event processing (block 1622), using the User Right Table and the PERC associated with the object and user to establish the channel (block 1624). This channel may optionally be shared between users of the VDE node 600, or may be used only by a specified user.

Control method 1502 then, in the preferred embodiment, tests whether the read channel was established successfully (decision block 1626). If the read channel was not successfully established ("no" exit to decision block 1626), control method 1502 "rolls back" the secured database transaction and provides an indication that the OPEN method failed (blocks 1628, 1630). Assuming the read channel was successfully established ("yes" exit to decision block 1626), control method 1502 may "commit" the secure database transaction (block 1632). This step of

"committing" the secure database transaction in the preferred embodiment involves, for example, deleting intermediate values associated with the secure transaction that has just been performed and, in one example, writing changed UDEs and MDEs to the secure database. It is generally not possible to "roll back" a secure transaction once it has been committed by block 1632. Then, control method 1502 may "tear down" the channel for open processing (block 1634) before terminating (block 1636). In some arrangements, such as multi-tasking VDE node environments, the open channel may be constantly maintained and available for use by any OPEN method that starts. In other implementations, the channel for open processing may be rebuilt and restarted each time an OPEN method starts.

Read

Figure 50, 50a-50f show examples of process control steps for performing a representative example of a READ method 1650. Comparing Figure 50 with Figure 49 reveals that the same overall high level processing may typically be performed for READ method 1650 as was described in connection with OPEN method 1500. Thus, READ method 1650 may call a control method 1652 in response to a read event, the control method in turn invoking an EVENT method 1654, a METER method 1656, a BILLING method 1658 and a BUDGET method 1660. In the preferred embodiment, READ control method 1652 may request

methods to fingerprint and/or obscure content before releasing the decrypted content.

Figures 50a-50e are similar to Figures 49a-49e. Of course, even though the same user data elements may be used for both the OPEN method 1500 and the READ method 1650, the method data elements for the READ method may be completely different, and in addition, the user data elements may provide different auditing, metering, billing and/or budgeting criteria for read as opposed to open processing.

Referring to Figure 50f, the READ control method 1652 must determine which key to use to decrypt content if it is going to release decrypted content to the user (block 1758). READ control method 1652 may make this key determination based, in part, upon the PERC 808 for the object (block 1760). READ control method 1652 may then call an ACCESS method to actually obtain the encrypted content to be decrypted (block 1762). The content is then decrypted using the key determined by block 1758 (block 1764). READ control method 1652 may then determine whether a "fingerprint" is desired (decision block 1766). If fingerprinting of the content is desired ("yes" exit of decision block 1766), READ control method 1652 may call the FINGERPRINT method (block 1768). Otherwise, READ control method 1652 may determine whether it is desired to obscure the

decrypted content (decision block 1770). If so, READ control method 1652 may call an OBSCURE method to perform this function (block 1772). Finally, READ control method 1652 may commit the secure database transaction (block 1774), optionally tear down the read channel (not shown), and terminate (block 1776).

Write

Figures 51, 51a-51f are flowcharts of examples of process control steps used to perform a representative example of a WRITE method 1780 in the preferred embodiment. WRITE method 1780 uses a control method 1782 to call an EVENT method 1784, METER method 1786, BILLING method 1788, and BUDGET method 1790 in this example. Thus, writing information into a container (either by overwriting information already stored in the container or adding new information to the container) in the preferred embodiment may be metered, billed and/or budgeted in a manner similar to the way opening a container and reading from a container can be metered, billed and budgeted. As shown in Figure 51, the end result of WRITE method 1780 is typically to encrypt content, update the container table of contents and related information to reflect the new content, and write the content to the object.

Figure 51a for the WRITE control method 1782 is similar to Figure 49a and Figure 50a for the OPEN control method and the READ control method, respectively. However, Figure 51b is slightly different from its open and read counterparts. In particular, block 1820 is performed if the WRITE EVENT method 1784 fails. This block 1820 updates the EVENT method map MDE to reflect new data. This is necessary to allow information written by block 1810 to be read by Figure 51b READ method block 1678 based on the same (but now updated) EVENT method map MDE.

Looking at Figure 51f, once the EVENT, METER, BILLING and BUDGET methods have returned successfully to WRITE control method 1782, the WRITE control method writes audit information to Audit UDE (blocks 1890, 1892), and then determines (based on the PERC for the object and user and an optional algorithm) which key should be used to encrypt the content before it is written to the container (blocks 1894, 1896). CONTROL method 1782 then encrypts the content (block 1898) possibly by calling an ENCRYPT method, and writes the encrypted content to the object (block 1900). CONTROL method 1782 may then update the table of contents (and related information) for the container to reflect the newly written information (block 1902), commit the secure database transaction (block 1904), and return (block 1906).

Close

Figure 52 is a flowchart of an example of process control steps to perform a representative example of a CLOSE method 1920 in the preferred embodiment. CLOSE method 1920 is used to close an open object. In the preferred embodiment, CLOSE method 1920 primes an audit trail and writes audit information to an Audit UDE (blocks 1922, 1924). CLOSE method 1920 then may destroy the current channel(s) being used to support and/or process one or more open objects (block 1926). As discussed above, in some (e.g., multi-user or multi-tasking) installations, the step of destroying a channel is not needed because the channel may be left operating for processing additional objects for the same or different users. CLOSE method 1920 also releases appropriate records and resources associated with the object at this time (block 1926). The CLOSE method 1920 may then write an audit trail (if required) into an Audit UDE (blocks 1928, 1930) before completing.

Event

Figure 53a is a flowchart of example process control steps provided by a more general example of an EVENT method 1940 provided by the preferred embodiment. Examples of EVENT methods are set forth in Figures 49b, 50b and 51b and are described above. EVENT method 1940 shown in Figure 53a is somewhat more generalized than the examples above. Like the

EVENT method examples above, EVENT method 1940 receives an identification of the event along with an event count and event parameters. EVENT method 1940 may first prime an EVENT audit trail (if required) by writing appropriate information to an EVENT method Audit Trail UDE (blocks 1942, 1944). EVENT method 1940 may then obtain and load an EVENT method map DTD from the secure database (blocks 1946, 1948). This EVENT method map DTD describes, in this example, the format of the EVENT method map MDE to be read and accessed immediately subsequently (by blocks 1950, 1952). In the preferred embodiment, MDEs and UDEs may have any of various different formats, and their formats may be flexibly specified or changed dynamically depending upon the installation, user, etc. The DTD, in effect, describes to the EVENT method 1940 how to read from the EVENT method map MDE. DTDs are also used to specify how methods should write to MDEs and UDEs, and thus may be used to implement privacy filters by, for example, preventing certain confidential user information from being written to data structures that will be reported to third parties.

Block 1950 ("map event to atomic element # and event count using a Map MDE") is in some sense the "heart" of EVENT method 1940. This step "maps" the event into an "atomic element number" to be responded to by subsequently called methods. An example of process control steps performed by a

somewhat representative example of this "mapping" step 1950 is shown in Figure 53b.

The Figure 53b example shows the process of converting a READ event that is associated with requesting byte range 1001-1500 from a specific piece of content into an appropriate atomic element. The example EVENT method mapping process (block 1950 in Figure 53a) can be detailed as the representative process shown in Figure 53b.

EVENT method mapping process 1950 may first look up the event code (READ) in the EVENT method MDE (1952) using the EVENT method map DTD (1948) to determine the structure and contents of the MDE. A test might then be performed to determine if the event code was found in the MDE (1956), and if not ("No" branch), the EVENT method mapping process may terminate (1958) without mapping the event to an atomic element number and count. If the event was found in the MDE ("Yes" branch), the EVENT method mapping process may then compare the event range (e.g., bytes 1001-1500) against the atomic element to event range mapping table stored in the MDE (block 1960). The comparison might yield one or more atomic element numbers or the event range might not be found in the mapping table. The result of the comparison might then be tested (block 1962) to determine if any atomic element numbers

were found in the table. If not ("No" branch), the EVENT method mapping process may terminate without selecting any atomic element numbers or counts (1964). If the atomic element numbers were found, the process might then calculate the atomic element count from the event range (1966). In this example, the process might calculate the number of bytes requested by subtracting the upper byte range from the lower byte range (e.g., $1500 - 1001 + 1 = 500$). The example EVENT method mapping process might then terminate (block 1968) and return the atomic element number(s) and counts.

EVENT method 1940 may then write an EVENT audit trail if required to an EVENT method Audit Trail UDE (block 1970, 1972). EVENT method 1940 may then prepare to pass the atomic element number and event count to the calling CONTROL method (or other control process) (at exit point 1978). Before that, however, EVENT method 1940 may test whether an atomic element was selected (decision block 1974). If no atomic element was selected, then the EVENT method may be failed (block 1974). This may occur for a number of reasons. For example, the EVENT method may fail to map an event into an atomic element if the user is not authorized to access the specific areas of content that the EVENT method MDE does not describe. This mechanism could be used, for example, to distribute customized versions of a piece of content and control access to the various

versions in the content object by altering the EVENT method MDE delivered to the user. A specific use of this technology might be to control the distribution of different language (e.g., English, French, Spanish) versions of a piece of content.

Billing

Figure 53c is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a BILLING method 1980. Examples of BILLING methods are set forth in Figures 49d, 50d, and 51d and are described above. BILLING method 1980 shown in Figure 53c is somewhat more generalized than the examples above. Like the BILLING method examples above, BILLING method 1980 receives a meter value to determine the amount to bill. BILLING method 1980 may first prime a BILLING audit trail (if required) by writing appropriate information to the BILLING method Audit Trail UDE (blocks 1982, 1984). BILLING method 1980 may then obtain and load a BILLING method map DTD from the secure database (blocks 1985, 1986), which describes the BILLING method map MDE (e.g., a price list, table, or parameters to the billing amount calculation algorithm) that should be used by this BILLING method. The BILLING method map MDE may be delivered either as part of the content object or as a separately deliverable component that is combined with the control information at registration.

The BILLING method map MDE in this example may describe the pricing algorithm that should be used in this BILLING method (e.g., bill \$0.001 per byte of content released). Block 1988 ("Map meter value to billing amount") functions in the same manner as block 1950 of the EVENT method; it maps the meter value to a billing value. Process step 1988 may also interrogate the secure database (as limited by the privacy filter) to determine if other objects or information (e.g., user information) are present as part of the BILLING method algorithm.

BILLING method 1980 may then write a BILLING audit trail if required to a BILLING method Audit Trail UDE (block 1990, 1992), and may prepare to return the billing amount to the calling CONTROL method (or other control process). Before that, however, BILLING method 1980 may test whether a billing amount was determined (decision block 1994). If no billing amount was determined, then the BILLING method may be failed (block 1996). This may occur if the user is not authorized to access the specific areas of the pricing table that the BILLING method MDE describes (e.g., you may purchase not more than \$100.00 of information from this content object).

Access

Figure 54 is a flowchart of an example of program control steps performed by an ACCESS method 2000. As described above, an ACCESS method may be used to access content embedded in an object 300 so it can be written to, read from, or otherwise manipulated or processed. In many cases, the ACCESS method may be relatively trivial since the object may, for example, be stored in a local storage that is easily accessible. However, in the general case, an ACCESS method 2000 must go through a more complicated procedure in order to obtain the object. For example, some objects (or parts of objects) may only be available at remote sites or may be provided in the form of a real-time download or feed (e.g., in the case of broadcast transmissions). Even if the object is stored locally to the VDE node, it may be stored as a secure or protected object so that it is not directly accessible to a calling process. ACCESS method 2000 establishes the connections, routings, and security requisites needed to access the object. These steps may be performed transparently to the calling process so that the calling process only needs to issue an access request and the particular ACCESS method corresponding to the object or class of objects handles all of the details and logistics involved in actually accessing the object.

ACCESS method 2000 may first prime an ACCESS audit trail (if required) by writing to an ACCESS Audit Trail UDE (blocks 2002, 2004). ACCESS method 2000 may then read and load an ACCESS method DTD in order to determine the format of an ACCESS MDE (blocks 2006, 2008). The ACCESS method MDE specifies the source and routing information for the particular object to be accessed in the preferred embodiment. Using the ACCESS method DTD, ACCESS method 2000 may load the correction parameters (e.g., by telephone number, account ID, password and/or a request script in the remote resource dependent language).

ACCESS method 2000 reads the ACCESS method MDE from the secure database, reads it in accordance with the ACCESS method DTD, and loads encrypted content source and routing information based on the MDE (blocks 2010, 2012). This source and routing information specifies the location of the encrypted content. ACCESS method 2000 then determines whether a connection to the content is available (decision block 2014). This "connection" could be, for example, an on-line connection to a remote site, a real-time information feed, or a path to a secure/protected resource, for example. If the connection to the content is not currently available ("No" exit of decision block 2014), then ACCESS method 2000 takes steps to open the connection (block 2016). If the connection fails (e.g.,

because the user is not authorized to access a protected secure resource), then the ACCESS method 2000 returns with a failure indication (termination point 2018). If the open connection succeeds, on the other hand, then ACCESS method 2000 obtains the encrypted content (block 2020). ACCESS method 2000 then writes an ACCESS audit trail if required to the secure database ACCESS method Audit Trail UDE (blocks 2022, 2024), and then terminates (terminate point 2026).

Decrypt and Encrypt

Figure 55a is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of a DECRYPT method 2030 provided by the preferred embodiment. DECRYPT method 2030 in the preferred embodiment obtains or derives a decryption key from an appropriate PERC 808, and uses it to decrypt a block of encrypted content. DECRYPT method 2030 is passed a block of encrypted content or a pointer to where the encrypted block is stored. DECRYPT 2030 selects a key number from a key block (block 2032). For security purposes, a content object may be encrypted with more than one key. For example, a movie may have the first 10 minutes encrypted using a first key, the second 10 minutes encrypted with a second key, and so on. These keys are stored in a PERC 808 in a structure called a "key block." The selection process involves determining the correct key to use from the key block in order to decrypt the content. The

process for this selection is similar to the process used by EVENT methods to map events into atomic element numbers. DECRYPT method 2030 may then access an appropriate PERC 808 from the secure database 610 and loads a key (or "seed") from a PERC (blocks 2034, 2036). This key information may be the actual decryption key to be used to decrypt the content, or it may be information from which the decryption key may be at least in part derived or calculated. If necessary, DECRYPT method 2030 computes the decryption key based on the information read from PERC 808 at block 2034 (block 2038). DECRYPT method 2030 then uses the obtained and/or calculated decryption key to actually decrypt the block of encrypted information (block 2040). DECRYPT method 2030 outputs the decrypted block (or the pointer indicating where it may be found), and terminates (termination point 2042).

Figure 55b is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of an ENCRYPT method 2050. ENCRYPT method 2050 is passed as an input, a block of information to encrypt (or a pointer indicating where it may be found). ENCRYPT method 2050 then may determine an encryption key to use from a key block (block 2052). The encryption key selection makes a determination if a key for a specific block of content to be written already exists in a key block stored in PERC 808. If the key already exists in the key block,

then the appropriate key number is selected. If no such key exists in the key block, a new key is calculated using an algorithm appropriate to the encryption algorithm. This key is then stored in the key block of PERC 808 so that DECRYPT method 2030 may access the key in order to decrypt the content stored in the content object. ENCRYPT method 2050 then accesses the appropriate PERC to obtain, derive and/or compute an encryption key to be used to encrypt the information block (blocks 2054, 2056, 2058, which are similar to Figure 55a blocks 2034, 2036, 2038). ENCRYPT method 2050 then actually encrypts the information block using the obtained and/or derived encryption key (block 2060) and outputs the encrypted information block or a pointer where it can be found before terminating (termination point 2062).

Content

Figure 56 is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative of a CONTENT method 2070 provided by the preferred embodiment. CONTENT method 2070 in the preferred embodiment builds a "synopsis" of protected content using a secure process. For example, CONTENT method 2070 may be used to derive unsecure ("public") information from secure content. Such derived public information might include, for example, an abstract, an index, a table of contents, a directory of files, a schedule when content may be available, or excerpts such as for example, a movie "trailer."

CONTENT method 2070 begins by determining whether the derived content to be provided must be derived from secure contents, or whether it is already available in the object in the form of static values (decision block 2070). Some objects may, for example, contain prestored abstracts, indexes, tables of contents, etc., provided expressly for the purpose of being extracted by the CONTENT method 2070. If the object contains such static values ("static" exit to decision block 2072), then CONTENT method 2070 may simply read this static value content information from the object (block 2074), optionally decrypt, and release this content description (block 2076). If, on the other hand, CONTENT method 2070 must derive the synopsis/content description from the secure object ("derived" exit to decision block 2072), then the CONTENT method may then securely read information from the container according to a synopsis algorithm to produce the synopsis (block 2078).

Extract and Embed

Figure 57a is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of an EXTRACT method 2080 provided by the preferred embodiment. EXTRACT method 2080 is used to copy or remove content from an object and place it into a new object. In the preferred embodiment, the EXTRACT method 2080 does not involve any release of content, but rather simply takes content from one container and places it

into another container, both of which may be secure. Extraction of content differs from release in that the content is never exposed outside a secure container. Extraction and Embedding are complementary functions; extract takes content from a container and creates a new container containing the extracted content and any specified control information associated with that content. Embedding takes content that is already in a container and stores it (or the complete object) in another container directly and/or by reference, integrating the control information associated with existing content with those of the new content.

EXTRACT method 2080 begins by priming an Audit UDE (blocks 2082, 2084). EXTRACT method then calls a BUDGET method to make sure that the user has enough budget for (and is authorized to) extract content from the original object (block 2086). If the user's budget does not permit the extraction ("no" exit to decision block 2088), then EXTRACT method 2080 may write a failure audit record (block 2090), and terminate (termination point 2092). If the user's budget permits the extraction ("yes" exit to decision block 2088), then the EXTRACT method 2080 creates a copy of the extracted object with specified rules and control information (block 2094). In the preferred embodiment, this step involves calling a method that actually controls the copy. This step may or may not involve decryption

and encryption, depending on the particular the PERC 808 associated with the original object, for example. EXTRACT method 2080 then checks whether any control changes are permitted by the rights authorizing the extract to begin with (decision block 2096). In some cases, the extract rights require an exact copy of the PERC 808 associated with the original object (or a PERC included for this purpose) to be placed in the new (destination) container ("no" exit to decision block 2096). If no control changes are permitted, then extract method 2080 may simply write audit information to the Audit UDE (blocks 2098, 2100) before terminating (terminate point 2102). If, on the other hand, the extract rights permit the user to make control changes ("yes" to decision block 2096), then EXTRACT method 2080 may call a method or load module that solicits new or changed control information (e.g., from the user, the distributor who created/granted extract rights, or from some other source) from the user (blocks 2104, 2106). EXTRACT method 2080 may then call a method or load module to create a new PERC that reflects these user-specified control information (block 2104). This new PERC is then placed in the new (destination) object, the auditing steps are performed, and the process terminates.

Figure 57b is an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of an EMBED method 2110 provided by the preferred embodiment. EMBED method

2110 is similar to EXTRACT method 2080 shown in Figure 57a. However, the EMBED method 2110 performs a slightly different function—it writes an object (or reference) into a destination container. Blocks 2112-2122 shown in Figure 57b are similar to blocks 2082-2092 shown in Figure 57a. At block 2124, EMBED method 2110 writes the source object into the destination container, and may at the same time extract or change the control information of the destination container. One alternative is to simply leave the control information of the destination container alone, and include the full set of control information associated with the object being embedded in addition to the original container control information. As an optimization, however, the preferred embodiment provides a technique whereby the control information associated with the object being embedded are "abstracted" and incorporated into the control information of the destination container. Block 2124 may call a method to abstract or change this control information. EMBED method 2110 then performs steps 2126-2130 which are similar to steps 2096, 2104, 2106 shown in Figure 57a to allow the user, if authorized, to change and/or specify control information associated with the embedded object and/or destination container. EMBED method 2110 then writes audit information into an Audit UDE (blocks 2132, 2134), before terminating (at termination point 2136).

Obscure

Figure 58a is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of an OBSCURE method 2140 provided by the preferred embodiment. OBSCURE method 2140 is typically used to release secure content in devalued form. For example, OBSCURE method 2140 may release a high resolution image in a lower resolution so that a viewer can appreciate the image but not enjoy its full value. As another example, the OBSCURE method 2140 may place an obscuring legend (e.g., "COPY," "PROOF," etc.) across an image to devalue it. OBSCURE method 2140 may "obscure" text, images, audio information, or any other type of content.

OBSCURE method 2140 first calls an EVENT method to determine if the content is appropriate and in the range to be obscured (block 2142). If the content is not appropriate for obscuring, the OBSCURE method terminates (decision block 2144 "no" exit, terminate point 2146). Assuming that the content is to be obscured ("yes" exit to decision block 2144), then OBSCURE method 2140 determines whether it has previously been called to obscure this content (decision block 2148). Assuming the OBSCURE 2140 has not previously called for this object/content ("yes" exit to decision block 2148), the OBSCURE method 2140 reads an appropriate OBSCURE method MDE from the secure database and loads an obscure formula and/or pattern

from the MDE (blocks 2150, 2152). The OBSCURE method 2140 may then apply the appropriate obscure transform based on the patterns and/or formulas loaded by block 2150 (block 2154). The OBSCURE method then may terminate (terminate block 2156).

Fingerprint

Figure 58b is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of a FINGERPRINT method 2160 provided by the preferred embodiment. FINGERPRINT method 2160 in the preferred embodiment operates to "mark" released content with a "fingerprint" identification of who released the content and/or check for such marks. This allows one to later determine who released unsecured content by examining the content. FINGERPRINT method 2160 may, for example, insert a user ID within a datastream representing audio, video, or binary format information. FINGERPRINT method 2160 is quite similar to OBSCURE method 2140 shown in Figure 58a except that the transform applied by FINGERPRINT method block 2174 "fingerprints" the released content rather than obscuring it.

Figure 58c shows an example of a "fingerprinting" procedure 2160 that inserts into released content "fingerprints" 2161 that identify the object and/or property and/or the user that

requested the released content and/or the date and time of the release and/or other identification criteria of the released content.

Such fingerprints 2161 can be "buried" – that is inserted in a manner that hides the fingerprints from typical users, sophisticated "hackers," and/or from all users, depending on the file format, the sophistication and/or variety of the insertion algorithms, and on the availability of original, non-fingerprinted content (for comparison for reverse engineering of algorithm(s)).

Inserted or embedded fingerprints 2161, in a preferred embodiment, may be at least in part encrypted to make them more secure. Such encrypted fingerprints 2161 may be embedded within released content provided in "clear" (plaintext) form.

Fingerprints 2161 can be used for a variety of purposes including, for example, the often related purposes of proving misuse of released materials and proving the source of released content. Software piracy is a particularly good example where fingerprinting can be very useful. Fingerprinting can also help to enforce content providers' rights for most types of electronically delivered information including movies, audio recordings, multimedia, information databases, and traditional "literary" materials. Fingerprinting is a desirable alternative or addition to copy protection.

Most piracy of software applications, for example, occurs not with the making of an illicit copy by an individual for use on another of the individual's own computers, but rather in giving a copy to another party. This often starts a chain (or more accurately a pyramid) of illegal copies, as copies are handed from individual to individual. The fear of identification resulting from the embedding of a fingerprint 2161 will likely dissuade most individuals from participating, as many currently do, in widespread, "casual" piracy. In some cases, content may be checked for the presence of a fingerprint by a fingerprint method to help enforce content providers' rights.

Different fingerprints 2161 can have different levels of security (e.g., one fingerprint 2161(1) could be readable/identifiable by commercial concerns, while another fingerprint 2161(2) could be readable only by a more trusted agency. The methods for generating the more secure fingerprint 2161 might employ more complex encryption techniques (e.g., digital signatures) and/or obscuring of location methodologies. Two or more fingerprints 2161 can be embedded in different locations and/or using different techniques to help protect fingerprinted information against hackers. The more secure fingerprints might only be employed periodically rather than each time content release occurs, if the technique used to provide a more secure fingerprint involves an undesired amount of

additional overhead. This may nevertheless be effective since a principal objective of fingerprinting is deterrence—that is the fear on the part of the creator of an illicit copy that the copying will be found out.

For example, one might embed a copy of a fingerprint 2161 which might be readily identified by an authorized party—for example a distributor, service personal, client administrator, or clearinghouse using a VDE electronic appliance 600. One might embed one or more additional copies or variants of a fingerprint 2161 (e.g., fingerprints carrying information describing some or all relevant identifying information) and this additional one or more fingerprints 2161 might be maintained in a more secure manner.

Fingerprinting can also protect privacy concerns. For example, the algorithm and/or mechanisms needed to identify the fingerprint 2161 might be available only through a particularly trusted agent.

Fingerprinting 2161 can take many forms. For example, in an image, the color of every N pixels (spread across an image, or spread across a subset of the image) might be subtly shifted in a visually unnoticeable manner (at least according to the normal, unaided observer). These shifts could be interpreted by analysis

of the image (with or without access to the original image), with each occurrence or lack of occurrence of a shift in color (or greyscale) being one or more binary "on or off" bits for digital information storage. The N pixels might be either consistent, or alternatively, pseudo-random in order (but interpretable, at least in part, by a object creator, object provider, client administrator, and/or VDE administrator).

Other modifications of an image (or moving image, audio, etc.) which provide a similar benefit (that is, storing information in a form that is not normally noticeable as a result of a certain modification of the source information) may be appropriate, depending on the application. For example, certain subtle modifications in the frequency of stored audio information can be modified so as to be normally unnoticeable to the listener while still being readable with the proper tools. Certain properties of the storage of information might be modified to provide such slight but interpretable variations in polarity of certain information which is optically stored to achieve similar results. Other variations employing other electronic, magnetic, and/or optical characteristic may be employed.

Content stored in files that employ graphical formats, such as Microsoft Windows word processing files, provide significant opportunities for "burying" a fingerprint 2161. Content that

includes images and/or audio provides the opportunity to embed fingerprints 2161 that may be difficult for unauthorized individuals to identify since, in the absence of an "unfingerprinted" original for purposes of comparison, minor subtle variations at one or more time instances in audio frequencies, or in one or more video images, or the like, will be in themselves undiscernible given the normally unknown nature of the original and the large amounts of data employed in both image and sound data (and which is not particularly sensitive to minor variations). With formatted text documents, particularly those created with graphical word processors (such as Microsoft Windows or Apple MacIntosh word processors and their DOS and Unix equivalents), fingerprints 2161 can normally be inserted unobtrusively into portions of the document data representation that are not normally visible to the end user (such as in a header or other non-displayed data field).

Yet another form of fingerprinting, which may be particularly suitable for certain textual documents, would employ and control the formation of characters for a given font. Individual characters may have a slightly different visual formation which connotes certain "fingerprint" information. This alteration of a given character's form would be generally undiscernible, in part because so many slight variations exist in versions of the same font available from different suppliers, and

in part because of the smallness of the variation. For example, in a preferred embodiment, a program such as Adobe Type Align could be used which, in its off-the-shelf versions, supports the ability of a user to modify font characters in a variety of ways. The mathematical definition of the font character is modified according to the user's instructions to produce a specific set of modifications to be applied to a character or font. Information content could be used in an analogous manner (as an alternative to user selections) to modify certain or all characters too subtly for user recognition under normal circumstances but which nevertheless provide appropriate encoding for the fingerprint 2161. Various subtly different versions of a given character might be used within a single document so as to increase the ability to carry transaction related font fingerprinted information.

Some other examples of applications for fingerprinting might include:

1. In software programs, selecting certain interchangeable code fragments in such a way as to produce more or less identical operation, but on analysis, differences that detail fingerprint information.
2. With databases, selecting to format certain fields, such as dates, to appear in different ways.

3. In games, adjusting backgrounds, or changing order of certain events, including noticeable or very subtle changes in timing and/or ordering of appearance of game elements, or slight changes in the look of elements of the game.

Fingerprinting method 2160 is typically performed (if at all) at the point at which content is released from a content object 300. However, it could also be performed upon distribution of an object to "mark" the content while still in encrypted form. For example, a network-based object repository could embed fingerprints 2161 into the content of an object before transmitting the object to the requester, the fingerprint information could identify a content requester/end user. This could help detect "spoof" electronic appliances 600 used to release content without authorization.

Destroy

Figure 59 is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative performed by a DESTROY method 2180 provided by the preferred embodiment. DESTROY method 2180 removes the ability of a user to use an object by destroying the URT the user requires to access the object. In the preferred embodiment, a DESTROY method 2180 may first write audit information to an Audit UDE (blocks 2182, 2184).

DESTROY method 2180 may then call a WRITE and/or ACCESS method to write information which will corrupt (and thus destroy) the header and/or other important parts of the object (block 2186). DESTROY method 2180 may then mark one or more of the control structures (e.g., the URT) as damaged by writing appropriate information to the control structure (blocks 2188, 2190). DESTROY method 2180, finally, may write additional audit information to Audit UDE (blocks 2192, 2194) before terminating (terminate point 2196).

Panic

Figure 60 is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of a PANIC method 2200 provided by the preferred embodiment. PANIC method 2200 may be called when a security violation is detected. PANIC method 2200 may prevent the user from further accessing the object currently being accessed by, for example, destroying the channel being used to access the object and marking one or more of the control structures (e.g., the URT) associated with the user and object as damaged (blocks 2206, and 2208-2210, respectively). Because the control structure is damaged, the VDE node will need to contact an administrator to obtain a valid control structure(s) before the user may access the same object again. When the VDE node contacts the administrator, the administrator may request information sufficient to satisfy itself

that no security violation occurred, or if a security violation did occur, take appropriate steps to ensure that the security violation is not repeated.

Meter

Figure 61 is a flowchart of an example of process control steps performed by a representative example of a METER method provided by the preferred embodiment. Although METER methods were described above in connection with Figures 49, 50 and 51, the METER method 2220 shown in Figure 61 is possibly a somewhat more representative example. In the preferred embodiment, METER method 2220 first primes an Audit Trail by accessing a METER Audit Trail UDE (blocks 2222, 2224). METER method 2220 may then read the DTD for the Meter UDE from the secure database (blocks 2226, 2228). METER method 2220 may then read the Meter UDE from the secure database (blocks 2230, 2232). METER method 2220 next may test the obtained Meter UDE to determine whether it has expired (decision block 2234). In the preferred embodiment, each Meter UDE may be marked with an expiration date. If the current date/time is later than the expiration date of the Meter UDE ("yes" exit to decision block 2234), then the METER method 2220 may record a failure in the Audit Record and terminate with a failure condition (block 2236, 2238).

Assuming the Meter UDE is not yet expired, the meter method 2220 may update it using the atomic element and event count passed to the METER method from, for example, an EVENT method (blocks 2239, 2240). The METER method 2220 may then save the Meter Use Audit Record in the Meter Audit Trail UDE (blocks 2242, 2244), before terminating (at terminate point 2246).

Additional Security Features Provided by the Preferred Embodiment

VDE 100 provided by the preferred embodiment has sufficient security to help ensure that it cannot be compromised short of a successful "brute force attack," and so that the time and cost to succeed in such a "brute force attack" substantially exceeds any value to be derived. In addition, the security provided by VDE 100 compartmentalizes the internal workings of VDE so that a successful "brute force attack" would compromise only a strictly bounded subset of protected information, not the entire system.

The following are among security aspects and features provided by the preferred embodiment:

- security of PPE 650 and the processes it performs
- security of secure database 610

- security of encryption/decryption performed by PPE
650
- key management; security of encryption/decryption
keys and shared secrets
- security of authentication/external communications
- security of secure database backup
- secure transportability of VDE internal information
between electronic appliances 600
- security of permissions to access VDE secure
information
- security of VDE objects 300
- integrity of VDE security.

Some of these security aspects and considerations are discussed above. The following provides an expanded discussion of preferred embodiment security features not fully addressed elsewhere.

Management of Keys and Shared Secrets

VDE 100 uses keys and shared secrets to provide security. The following key usage features are provided by the preferred embodiment:

- different cryptosystem/key types
- secure key length
- key generation

- key "convolution" and key "aging."

Each of these types are discussed below.

A. Public-Key and Symmetric Key Cryptosystems

The process of disguising or transforming information to hide its substance is called encryption. Encryption produces "ciphertext." Reversing the encryption process to recover the substance from the ciphertext is called "decryption." A cryptographic algorithm is the mathematical function used for encryption and decryption.

Most modern cryptographic algorithms use a "key." The "key" specifies one of a family of transformations to be provided. Keys allow a standard, published and tested cryptographic algorithm to be used while ensuring that specific transformations performed using the algorithm are kept secret. The secrecy of the particular transformations thus depends on the secrecy of the key, not on the secrecy of the algorithm.

There are two general forms of key-based algorithms, either or both of which may be used by the preferred embodiment
PPE 650:

symmetric; and
public-key ("PK").

Symmetric algorithms are algorithms where the encryption key can be calculated from the decryption key and vice versa. In many such systems, the encryption and decryption keys are the same. The algorithms, also called "secret-key", "single key" or "shared secret" algorithms, require a sender and receiver to agree on a key before ciphertext produced by a sender can be decrypted by a receiver. This key must be kept secret. The security of a symmetric algorithm rests in the key: divulging the key means that anybody could encrypt and decrypt information in such a cryptosystem. See Schneier, Applied Cryptography at Page 3. Some examples of symmetric key algorithms that the preferred embodiment may use include DES, Skipjack/Clipper, IDEA, RC2, and RC4.

In public-key cryptosystems, the key used for encryption is different from the key used for decryption. Furthermore, it is computationally infeasible to derive one key from the other. The algorithms used in these cryptosystems are called "public key" because one of the two keys can be made public without endangering the security of the other key. They are also sometimes called "asymmetric" cryptosystems because they use different keys for encryption and decryption. Examples of public-key algorithms include RSA, El Gamal and LUC.

The preferred embodiment PPE 650 may operate based on only symmetric key cryptosystems, based on public-key cryptosystems, or based on both symmetric key cryptosystems and public-key cryptosystems. VDE 100 does not require any specific encryption algorithms; the architecture provided by the preferred embodiment may support numerous algorithms including PK and/or secret key (non PK) algorithms. In some cases, the choice of encryption/decryption algorithm will be dependent on a number of business decisions such as cost, market demands, compatibility with other commercially available systems, export laws, etc.

Although the preferred embodiment is not dependent on any particular type of cryptosystem or encryption/decryption algorithm(s), the preferred example uses PK cryptosystems for secure communications between PPEs 650, and uses secret key cryptosystems for "bulk" encryption/decryption of VDE objects 300. Using secret key cryptosystems (e.g., DES implementations using multiple keys and multiple passes, Skipjack, RC2, or RC4) for "bulk" encryption/decryption provides efficiencies in encrypting and decrypting large quantities of information, and also permits PPEs 650 without PK-capability to deal with VDE objects 300 in a variety of applications. Using PK cryptosystems for communications may provide advantages such as eliminating reliance on secret shared external communication keys to

establish communications, allowing for a challenge/response that doesn't rely on shared internal secrets to authenticate PPEs 650, and allowing for a publicly available "certification" process without reliance on shared secret keys.

Some content providers may wish to restrict use of their content to PK implementations. This desire can be supported by making the availability of PK capabilities, and the specific nature or type of PK capabilities, in PPEs 650 a factor in the registration of VDE objects 300, for example, by including a requirement in a REGISTER method for such objects in the form of a load module that examines a PPE 650 for specific or general PK capabilities before allowing registration to continue.

Although VDE 100 does not require any specific algorithm, it is highly desirable that all PPEs 650 are capable of using the same algorithm for bulk encryption/decryption. If the bulk encryption/decryption algorithm used for encrypting VDE objects 300 is not standardized, then it is possible that not all VDE electronic appliances 600 will be capable of handling all VDE objects 300. Performance differences will exist between different PPEs 650 and associated electronic appliances 600 if standardized bulk encryption/decryption algorithms are not implemented in whole or in part by hardware-based encrypt/decrypt engine 522, and instead are implemented in

software. In order to support algorithms that are not implemented in whole or in part by encrypt/decrypt engine 522, a component assembly that implements such an algorithm must be available to a PPE 650.

B. Key Length

Increased key length may increase security. A "brute-force" attack of a cryptosystem involves trying every possible key. The longer the key, the more possible keys there are to try. At some key length, available computation resources will require an impractically large amount of time for a "brute force" attacker to try every possible key:

VDE 100 provided by the preferred embodiment accommodates and can use many different key lengths. The length of keys used by VDE 100 in the preferred embodiment is determined by the algorithm(s) used for encryption/decryption, the level of security desired, and throughput requirements. Longer keys generally require additional processing power to ensure fast encryption/decryption response times. Therefore, there is a tradeoff between (a) security, and (b) processing time and/or resources. Since a hardware-based PPE encrypt/decrypt engine 522 may provide faster processing than software-based encryption/decryption, the hardware-based approach may, in general, allow use of longer keys.

The preferred embodiment may use a 1024 bit modulus (key) RSA cryptosystem implementation for PK encryption/decryption, and may use 56-bit DES for "bulk" encryption/decryption. Since the 56-bit key provided by standard DES may not be long enough to provide sufficient security for at least the most sensitive VDE information, multiple DES encryptions using multiple passes and multiple DES keys may be used to provide additional security. DES can be made significantly more secure if operated in a manner that uses multiple passes with different keys. For example, three passes with 2 or 3 separate keys is much more secure because it effectively increases the length of the key. RC2 and RC4 (alternatives to DES) can be exported for up to 40-bit key sizes, but the key size probably needs to be much greater to provide even DES level security. The 80-bit key length provided by NSA's Skipjack may be adequate for most VDE security needs.

The capability of downloading code and other information dynamically into PPE 650 allows key length to be adjusted and changed dynamically even after a significant number of VDE electronic appliances 600 are in use. The ability of a VDE administrator to communicate with each PPE 650 efficiently makes such after-the-fact dynamic changes both possible and cost-effective. New or modified cryptosystems can be downloaded into existing PPEs 650 to replace or add to the cryptosystem

repertoire available within the PPE, allowing older PPEs to maintain compatibility with newer PPEs and/or newly released VDE objects 300 and other VDE-protected information. For example, software encryption/decryption algorithms may be downloaded into PPE 650 at any time to supplement the hardware-based functionality of encrypt/decrypt engine 522 by providing different key length capabilities. To provide increased flexibility, PPE encrypt/decrypt engine 522 may be configured to anticipate multiple passes and/or variable and/or longer key lengths. In addition, it may be desirable to provide PPEs 650 with the capability to internally generate longer PK keys.

C. Key Generation

Key generation techniques provided by the preferred embodiment permit PPE 650 to generate keys and other information that are "known" only to it.

The security of encrypted information rests in the security of the key used to encrypt it. If a cryptographically weak process is used to generate keys, the entire security is weak. Good keys are random bit strings so that every possible key in the key space is equally likely. Therefore, keys should in general be derived from a reliably random source, for example, by a cryptographically secure pseudo-random number generator seeded from such a source. Examples of such key generators are

described in Schneier, Applied Cryptography (John Wiley and Sons, 1994), chapter 15. If keys are generated outside a given PPE 650 (e.g., by another PPE 650), they must be verified to ensure they come from a trusted source before they can be used. "Certification" may be used to verify keys.

The preferred embodiment PPE 650 provides for the automatic generation of keys. For example, the preferred embodiment PPE 650 may generate its own public/private key pair for use in protecting PK-based external communications and for other reasons. A PPE 650 may also generate its own symmetric keys for various purposes during and after initialization. Because a PPE 650 provides a secure environment, most key generation in the preferred embodiment may occur within the PPE (with the possible exception of initial PPE keys used at manufacturing or installation time to allow a PPE to authenticate initial download messages to it).

Good key generation relies on randomness. The preferred embodiment PPE 650 may, as mentioned above in connection with Figure 9, include a hardware-based random number generator 542 with the characteristics required to generate reliable random numbers. These random numbers may be used to "seed" a cryptographically strong pseudo-random number generator (e.g., DES operated in Output Feedback Mode) for

generation of additional key values derived from the random seed. In the preferred embodiment, random number generator 542 may consist of a "noise diode" or other physically-based source of random values (e.g., radioactive decay).

If no random number generator 542 is available in the PPE 650, the SPE 503 may employ a cryptographic algorithm (e.g., DES in Output Feedback Mode) to generate a sequence of pseudo-random values derived from a secret value protected within the SPE. Although these numbers are pseudo-random rather than truly random, they are cryptographically derived from a value unknown outside the SPE 503 and therefore may be satisfactory in some applications.

In an embodiment incorporating an HPE 655 without an SPE 503, the random value generator 565 software may derive reliably random numbers from unpredictable external physical events (e.g., high-resolution timing of disk I/O completions or of user keystrokes at an attached keyboard 612).

Conventional techniques for generating PK and non-PK keys based upon such "seeds" may be used. Thus, if performance and manufacturing costs permit, PPE 650 in the preferred embodiment will generate its own public/private key pair based on such random or pseudo-random "seed" values. This key pair

may then be used for external communications between the PPE 650 that generated the key pair and other PPEs that wish to communicate with it. For example, the generating PPE 650 may reveal the public key of the key pair to other PPEs. This allows other PPEs 650 using the public key to encrypt messages that may be decrypted only by the generating PPE (the generating PPE is the only PPE that "knows" the corresponding "private key"). Similarly, the generating PPE 650 may encrypt messages using its private key that, when decrypted successfully by other PPEs with the generating PPE's public key, permit the other PPEs to authenticate that the generating PPE sent the message.

Before one PPE 650 uses a public key generated by another PPE, a public key certification process should be used to provide authenticity certificates for the public key. A public-key certificate is someone's public key "signed" by a trustworthy entity such as an authentic PPE 650 or a VDE administrator. Certificates are used to thwart attempts to convince a PPE 650 that it is communicating with an authentic PPE when it is not (e.g., it is actually communicating with a person attempting to break the security of PPE 650). One or more VDE administrators in the preferred embodiment may constitute a certifying authority. By "signing" both the public key generated by a PPE 650 and information about the PPE and/or the corresponding VDE electronic appliance 600 (e.g., site ID, user ID, expiration

date, name, address, etc.), the VDE administrator certifying authority can certify that information about the PPE and/or the VDE electronic appliance is correct and that the public key belongs to that particular VDE mode.

Certificates play an important role in the trustedness of digital signatures, and also are important in the public-key authentication communications protocol (to be discussed below). In the preferred embodiment, these certificates may include information about the trustedness/level of security of a particular VDE electronic appliance 600 (e.g., whether or not it has a hardware-based SPE 503 or is instead a less trusted software emulation type HPE 655) that can be used to avoid transmitting certain highly secure information to less trusted/secure VDE installations.

Certificates can also play an important role in decommissioning rogue users and/or sites. By including a site and/or user ID in a certificate, a PPE can evaluate this information as an aspect of authentication. For example, if a VDE administrator or clearinghouse encounters a certificate bearing an ID (or other information) that meets certain criteria (e.g., is present on a list of decommissioned and/or otherwise suspicious users and/or sites), they may choose to take actions based on those criteria such as refusing to communicate,

communicating disabling information, notifying the user of the condition, etc. Certificates also typically include an expiration date to ensure that certificates must be replaced periodically, for example, to ensure that sites and/or users must stay in contact with a VDE administrator and/or to allow certification keys to be changed periodically. More than one certificate based on different keys may be issued for sites and/or users so that if a given certification key is compromised, one or more "backup" certificates may be used. If a certification key is compromised, A VDE administrator may refuse to authenticate based on certificates generated with such a key, and send a signal after authenticating with a "backup" certificate that invalidates all use of the compromised key and all certificates associated with it in further interactions with VDE participants. A new one or more "backup" certificates and keys may be created and sent to the authenticated site/user after such a compromise.

If multiple certificates are available, some of the certificates may be reserved as backups. Alternatively or in addition, one certificate from a group of certificates may be selected (e.g., by using RNG 542) in a given authentication, thereby reducing the likelihood that a certificate associated with a compromised certification key will be used. Still alternatively, more than one certificate may be used in a given authentication.

To guard against the possibility of compromise of the certification algorithm (e.g., by an unpredictable advance in the mathematical foundations on which the algorithm is based), distinct algorithms may be used for different certificates that are based on different mathematical foundations.

Another technique that may be employed to decrease the probability of compromise is to keep secret (in protected storage in the PPE 650) the "public" values on which the certificates are based, thereby denying an attacker access to values that may aid in the attack. Although these values are nominally "public," they need be known only to those components which actually validate certificates (i.e., the PPE 650).

In the preferred embodiment, PPE 650 may generate its own certificate, or the certificate may be obtained externally, such as from a certifying authority VDE administrator. Irrespective of where the digital certificate is generated, the certificate is eventually registered by the VDE administrator certifying authority so that other VDE electronic appliances 600 may have access to (and trust) the public key. For example, PPE 650 may communicate its public key and other information to a certifying authority which may then encrypt the public key and other information using the certifying authority's private key. Other installations 600 may trust the "certificate" because it can

be authenticated by using the certifying authority's public key to decrypt it. As another example, the certifying authority may encrypt the public key it receives from the generating PPE 650 and use it to encrypt the certifying authority's private key. The certifying authority may then send this encrypted information back to the generating PPE 650. The generating PPE 650 may then use the certifying authority's private key to internally create a digital certificate, after which it may destroy its copy of the certifying authority's private key. The generating PPE 650 may then send out its digital certificate to be stored in a certification repository at the VDE administrator (or elsewhere) if desired.

The certificate process can also be implemented with an external key pair generator and certificate generator, but might be somewhat less secure depending on the nature of the secure facility. In such a case, a manufacturing key should be used in PPE 650 to limit exposure to the other keys involved.

A PPE 650 may need more than one certificate. For example, a certificate may be needed to assure other users that a PPE is authentic, and to identify the PPE. Further certificates may be needed for individual users of a PPE 650. These certificates may incorporate both user and site information or may only include user information. Generally, a certifying authority will require a valid site certificate to be presented prior to creating a certificate for a given user. Users may each require

their own public key/private key pair in order to obtain certificates. VDE administrators, clearinghouses, and other participants may normally require authentication of both the site (PPE 650) and of the user in a communication or other interaction. The processes described above for key generation and certification for PPEs 650 may also be used to form site/user certificates or user certificates.

Certificates as described above may also be used to certify the origin of load modules 1100 and/or the authenticity of administrative operations. The security and assurance techniques described above may be employed to decrease the probability of compromise for any such certificate (including certificates other than the certificate for a VDE electronic appliance 600's identity).

D. Key Aging and Convolution

PPE 650 also has the ability in the preferred embodiment to generate secret keys and other information that is shared between multiple PPEs 650. In the preferred embodiment, such secret keys and other information may be shared between multiple VDE electronic appliances 600 without requiring the shared secret information to ever be communicated explicitly between the electronic appliances. More specifically, PPE 650 uses a technique called "key convolution" to derive keys based on

a deterministic process in response to seed information shared between multiple VDE electronic appliances 600. Since the multiple electronic appliances 600 "know" what the "seed" information is and also "know" the deterministic process used to generate keys based on this information, each of the electronic appliances may independently generate the "true key." This permits multiple VDE electronic appliances 600 to share a common secret key without potentially compromising its security by communicating it over an insecure channel.

No encryption key should be used for an indefinite period. The longer a key is used, the greater the chance that it may be compromised and the greater the potential loss if the key is compromised but still in use to protect new information. The longer a key is used, the more information it may protect and therefore the greater the potential rewards for someone to spend the effort necessary to break it. Further, if a key is used for a long time, there may be more ciphertext available to an attacker attempting to break the key using a ciphertext-based attack. See Schneier at 150-151. Key convolution in the preferred embodiment provides a way to efficiently change keys stored in secure database 610 on a routine periodic or other basis while simplifying key management issues surrounding the change of keys. In addition, key convolution may be used to provide "time

aged keys" (discussed below) to provide "expiration dates" for key usage and/or validity.

Figure 62 shows an example implementation of key convolution in the preferred embodiment. Key convolution may be performed using a combination of a site ID 2821 and the high-order bits of the RTC 528 to yield a site-unique value "V" that is time-dependent on a large scale (e.g., hours or days). This value "V" may be used as the key for an encryption process 2871 that transforms a convolution seed value 2861 into a "current convolution key" 2862. The seed value 2861 may be a universe-wide or group-wide shared secret value, and may be stored in secure key storage (e.g., protected memory within PPE 650). The seed value 2861 is installed during the manufacturing process and may be updated occasionally by a VDE administrator. There may be a plurality of seed values 2861 corresponding to different sets of objects 300.

The current convolution key 2862 represents an encoding of the site ID 2821 and current time. This transformed value 2862 may be used as a key for another encryption process 2872 to transform the stored key 810 in the object's PERC 808 into the true private body key 2863 for the object's contents.

The "convolution function" performed by blocks 2861, 2871 may, for example, be a one-way function that can be performed independently at both the content creator's site and at the content user's site. If the content user does not use precisely the same convolution function and precisely the same input values (e.g., time and/or site and/or other information) as used by the content creator, then the result of the convolution function performed by the content user will be different from the content creator's result. If the result is used as a symmetrical key for encryption by the content creator, the content user will not be able to decrypt unless the content user's result is the same as the result of the content creator.

The time component for input to the key convolution function may be derived from RTC 528 (care being taken to ensure that slight differences in RTC synchronization between VDE electronic appliances will not cause different electronic appliances to use different time components). Different portions of the RTC 528 output may be used to provide keys with different valid durations, or some tolerance can be built into the process to try several different key values. For example, a "time granularity" parameter can be adjusted to provide time tolerance in terms of days, weeks, or any other time period. As one example, if the "time granularity" is set to 2 days, and the tolerance is ± 2 days, then three real-time input values can be

tried as input to the convolution algorithm. Each of the resulting key values may be tried to determine which of the possible keys is actually used. In this example, the keys will have only a 4 day life span.

Figure 63 shows how an appropriate convoluted key may be picked in order to compensate for skew between the user's RTC 528 and the producer's RTC 528. A sequence of convolution keys 2862 (a-e) may be generated by using different input values 2881(a-e), each derived from the site ID 2821 and the RTC 528 value plus or minus a differential (e.g., -2 days, -1 days, no delta, +1 days, +2 days). The convolution steps 2871(a-e) are used to generate the sequence of keys 2862(a-e).

Meanwhile, the creator site may use the convolution step 2871(z) based on his RTC 528 value (adjusted to correspond to the intended validity time for the key) to generate a convoluted key 2862(z), which may then be used to generate the content key 2863 in the object's PERC 808. To decrypt the object's content, the user site may use each of its sequence of convolution keys 2862 (a-e) to attempt to generate the master content key 810. When this is attempted, as long as the RTC 538 of the creator site is within acceptable tolerance of the RTC 528 at the user site, one of keys 2862(a-e) will match key 2862(z) and the decryption

will be successful. In this example, matching is determined by validity of decrypted output, not by direct comparison of keys.

Key convolution as described above need not use both site ID and time as a value. Some keys may be generated based on current real time, other keys might be generated on site ID, and still other keys might be generated based on both current real-time and site ID.

Key convolution can be used to provide "time-aged" keys. Such "time-aged" keys provide an automatic mechanism for allowing keys to expire and be replaced by "new" keys. They provide a way to give a user time-limited rights to make time-limited use of an object, or portions of an object, without requiring user re-registration but retaining significant control in the hands of the content provider or administrator. If secure database 610 is sufficiently secure, similar capabilities can be accomplished by checking an expiration date/time associated with a key, but this requires using more storage space for each key or group of keys.

In the preferred embodiment, PERCs 808 can include an expiration date and/or time after which access to the VDE-protected information they correspond to is no longer authorized. Alternatively or in addition, after a duration of time related to

some aspect of the use of the electronic appliance 600 or one or more VDE objects 300, a PERC 808 can force a user to send audit history information to a clearinghouse, distributor, client administrator, or object creator in order to regain or retain the right to use the object(s). The PERC 808 can enforce such time-based restrictions by checking/enforcing parameters that limit key usage and/or availability past time of authorized use. "Time aged" keys may be used to enforce or enhance this type of time-related control of access to VDE protected information.

"Time aged" keys can be used to encrypt and decrypt a set of information for a limited period of time, thus requiring re-registration or the receipt of new permissions or the passing of audit information, without which new keys are not provided for user use. Time aged keys can also be used to improve system security since one or more keys would be automatically replaced based on the time ageing criteria—and thus, cracking secure database 610 and locating one or more keys may have no real value. Still another advantage of using time aged keys is that they can be generated dynamically—thereby obviating the need to store decryption keys in secondary and/or secure memory.

A "time aged key" in the preferred embodiment is not a "true key" that can be used for encryption/decryption, but rather is a piece of information that a PPE 650, in conjunction with

other information, can use to generate a "true key." This other information can be time-based, based on the particular "ID" of the PPE 650, or both. Because the "true key" is never exposed but is always generated within a secure PPE 650 environment, and because secure PPEs are required to generate the "true key," VDE 100 can use "time aged" keys to significantly enhance security and flexibility of the system.

The process of "aging" a key in the preferred embodiment involves generating a time-aged "true key" that is a function of: (a) a "true key," and (b) some other information (e.g., real time parameters, site ID parameters, etc.) This information is combined/transformed (e.g., using the "key convolution" techniques discussed above) to recover or provide a "true key." Since the "true key" can be recovered, this avoids having to store the "true key" within PERC 808, and allow different "true keys" to correspond to the same information within PERC 808. Because the "true key" is not stored in the PERC 808, access to the PERC does not provide access to the information protected by the "true key." Thus, "time aged" keys allows content creators/providers to impose a limitation (e.g., site based and/or time based) on information access that is, in a sense, "external of" or auxiliary to the permissioning provided by one or more PERCs 808. For example, a "time aged" key may enforce an additional time limitation on access to certain protected information, this

additional time limitation being independent of any information or permissioning contained within the PERC 808 and being instead based on one or more time and/or site ID values.

As one example, time-aged decryption keys may be used to allow the purchaser of a "trial subscription" of an electronically published newspaper to access each edition of the paper for a period of one week, after which the decryption keys will no longer work. In this example, the user would need to purchase one or more new PERCs 808, or receive an update to an existing one or more permissions records, to access editions other than the ones from that week. Access to those other editions which might be handled with a totally different pricing structure (e.g., a "regular" subscription rate as opposed to a free or minimal "trial" subscription rate).

In the preferred embodiment, time-aged-based "true keys" can be generated using a one-way or invertible "key convolution" function. Input parameters to the convolution function may include the supplied time-aged keys; user and/or site specific values; a specified portion (e.g., a certain number of high order bits) of the time value from an RTC 528 (if present) or a value derived from such time value in a predefined manner; and a block or record identifier that may be used to ensure that each time aged key is unique. The output of the "key convolution" function

may be a "true key" that is used for decryption purposes until discarded. Running the function with a time-aged key and inappropriate time values typically yields a useless key that will not decrypt.

Generation of a new time aged key can be triggered based on some value of elapsed, absolute or relative time (e.g., based on a real time value from a clock such as RTC 528). At that time, the convolution would produce the wrong key and decryption could not occur until the time-aged key is updated. The criteria used to determine when a new "time aged key" is to be created may itself be changed based on time or some other input variable to provide yet another level of security. Thus, the convolution function and/or the event invoking it may change, shift or employ a varying quantity as a parameter.

One example of the use of time-aged keys is as follows:

- 1) A creator makes a "true" key, and encrypts content with it.

- 2) A creator performs a "reverse convolution" to yield a "time aged key" using, as input parameters to the "reverse convolution":
 - a) the "true" key,

- b) a time parameter (e.g., valid high-order time bits of RTC 528), and
 - c) optional other information (e.g., site ID and/or user ID).
- 3) The creator distributes the "time-aged key" to content users (the creator may also need to distribute the convolution algorithm and/or parameters if she is not using a convolution algorithm already available to the content users' PPE 650).
- 4) The content user's PPE 650 combines:
- a) "time-aged" key
 - b) high-order time bits
 - c) required other information (same as 2c).

It performs a convolution function (i.e., the inverse of "reverse convolution" algorithm in step (2) above) to obtain the "true" key. If the supplied time and/or other information is "wrong," the convolution function will not yield the "true" key, and therefore content cannot be decrypted.

Any of the key blocks associated with VDE objects 300 or other items can be either a regular key block or a time-aged key block, as specified by the object creator during the object

configuration process, or where appropriate, a distributor or client administrator.

"Time aged" keys can also be used as part of protocols to provide secure communications between PPEs 650. For example, instead of providing "true" keys to PPE 650 for communications, VDE 100 may provide only "partial" communication keys to the PPE. These "partial" keys may be provided to PPE 650 during initialization, for example. A predetermined algorithm may produce "true keys" for use to encrypt/decrypt information for secure communications. The predetermined algorithm can "age" these keys the same way in all PPEs 650, or PPEs 650 can be required to contact a VDE administrator at some predetermined time so a new set of partial communications keys can be downloaded to the PPEs. If the PPE 650 does not generate or otherwise obtain "new" partial keys, then it will be disabled from communicating with other PPEs (a further, "fail safe" key may be provided to ensure that the PPE can communicate with a VDE administrator for reinitialization purposes). Two sets of partial keys can be maintained within a PPE 650 to allow a fixed amount of overlap time across all VDE appliances 600. The older of the two sets of partial keys can be updated periodically.

The following additional types of keys (to be discussed below) can also be "aged" in the preferred embodiment:

individual message keys (i.e., keys used for a particular message), administrative, stationary and travelling object shared keys, secure database keys, and private body and content keys.

Initial Installation Key Management

Figure 64 shows the flow of universe-wide, or "master," keys during creating of a PPE 650. In the preferred embodiment, the PPE 650 contains a secure non-volatile key storage 2802 (e.g. SPU 500 non-volatile RAM 534 B or protected storage maintained by HPE 655) that is initialized with keys generated by the manufacturer and by the PPE itself.

The manufacturer possesses (i.e., knows, and protects from disclosure or modification) one or more public key 2811/private key 2812 key pairs used for signing and validating site identification certificates 2821. For each site, the manufacturer generates a site ID 2821 and list of site characteristics 2822. In addition, the manufacturer possesses the public keys 2813, 2814 for validating load modules and initialization code downloads. To enhance security, there may be a plurality of such certification keys, and each PPE 650 may be initialized using only a subset of such keys of each type.

As part of the initialization process, the PPE 650 may generate internally or the manufacturer may generate and supply, one or more pairs of site-specific public keys 2815 and private keys 2816. These are used by the PPE 650 to prove its identity. Similarly, site-specific database key(s) 2817 for the site are generated, and if needed (i.e., if a Random Number Generator 542 is not available), a random initialization seed 2818 is generated.

The initialization may begin by generating site ID 2821 and characteristics 2822 and the site public key 2815/private key 2816 pair(s). These values are combined and may be used to generate one or more site identity certificates 2823. The site identity certificates 2823 may be generated by the public key generation process 2804, and may be stored both in the PPE's protected key storage 2802 and in the manufacturer's VDE site certificate database 2803.

The certification process 2804 may be performed either by the manufacturer or internally to the PPE 650. If performed by the PPE 650, the PPE will temporarily receive the identity certification private key(s) 2812, generate the certificate 2823, store the certificate in local key storage 2802 and transmit it to the manufacturer, after which the PPE 650 must erase its copy of the identity certification private key(s) 2812.

Subsequently, initialization may require generation, by the PPE 650 or by the manufacturer, of site-specific database key(s) 2817 and of site-specific seed value(s) 2818, which are stored in the key storage 2802. In addition, the download certification key(s) 2814 and the load module certification key(s) 2813 may be supplied by the manufacturer and stored in the key storage 2802. These may be used by the PPE 650 to validate all further communications with external entities.

At this point, the PPE 650 may be further initialized with executable code and data by downloading information certified by the load module key(s) 2813 and download key(s) 2814. In the preferred embodiment, these keys may be used to digitally sign data to be loaded into the PPE 650, guaranteeing its validity, and additional key(s) encrypted using the site-specific public key(s) 2815 may be used to encrypt such data and protect it from disclosure.

Installation and Update Key Management

Figure 65 illustrates an example of further key installation either by the manufacturer or by a subsequent update by a VDE administrator. The manufacturer or administrator may supply initial or new values for private header key(s) 2831, external communication key(s) 2832, administrative object keys 2833, or other shared key(s) 2834. These keys may be universe-wide in

the same sense as the global certification keys 2811, 2813, and 2814, or they may be restricted to use within a defined group of VDE instances.

To perform this installation, the installer retrieves the destination site's identity certificate(s) 2823, and from that extracts the site public key(s) 2815. These key(s) may be used in an encryption process 2841 to protect the keys being installed. The key(s) being installed are then transmitted inside the destination site's PPE 650. Inside the PPE 650, the decryption process 2842 may use the site private key(s) 2816 to decrypt the transmission. The PPE 650 then stores the installed or updated keys in its key storage 2802.

Object-Specific Key Use

Figures 66 and 67 illustrate the use of keys in protecting data and control information associated with VDE objects 300.

Figure 66 shows use of a stationary content object 850 whose control information is derived from an administrative object 870. The objects may be received by the PPE 650 (e.g., by retrieval from an object repository 728 over a network or retrieved from local storage). The administrative object decryption process 2843 may use the private header key(s) 2815 to decrypt the administrative object 870, thus retrieving the

PERC 808 governing access to the content object 850. The private body key(s) 810 may then be extracted from the PERC 808 and used by the content decryption process 2845 to make the content available outside the PPE 650. In addition, the database key(s) 2817 may be used by the encryption process 2844 to prepare the PERC for storage outside the PPE 650 in the secure database 610. In subsequent access to the content object 850, the PERC 808 may be retrieved from the secure database 610, decrypted with database key(s) 2817, and used directly, rather than being extracted from administrative object 870.

Figure 67 shows the similar process involving a traveling object 860. The principal distinction between Figures 66 and 67 is that the PERC 808 is stored directly within the traveling object 860, and therefore may be used immediately after the decryption process 2843 to provide a private header key(s) 2831. This private header key 2831 is used to process content within the traveling object 860.

Secret-Key Variations

Figures 64 through 67 illustrate the preferred public-key embodiment, but may also be used to help understand the secret-key versions. In secret-key embodiments, the certification process and the public key encryptions/decryptions are replaced with private-key encryptions, and the public key/private-key

pairs are replaced with individual secret keys that are shared between the PPE 650 instance and the other parties (e.g., the load module supplier(s), the PPE manufacturer). In addition, the certificate generation process 2804 is not performed in secret-key embodiments, and no site identity certificates 2823 or VDE certificate database 2803 exist.

Key Types

The detailed descriptions of key types below further explain secret-key embodiments; this summary is not intended as a complete description. The preferred embodiment PPE 650 can use different types of keys and/or different "shared secrets" for different purposes. Some key types apply to a Public-Key/Secret Key implementation, other keys apply to a Secret Key only

implementation, and still other key types apply to both. The following table lists examples of various key and "shared secret" information used in the preferred embodiment, and where this information is used and stored:

Key/Secret Information Type	Used in PK or Non-PK	Example Storage Location(s)
Master Key(s) (may include some of the specific keys mentioned below)	Both	PPE Manufacturing facility VDE administrator
Manufacturing Key	Both (PK optional)	PPE (PK case) Manufacturing facility
Certification key pair	PK	PPE Certification repository
Public/private key pair	PK	PPE Certification repository (Public Key only)
Initial secret key	Non-PK	PPE
PPE manufacturing ID	Non-PK	PPE
Site ID, shared code, shared keys and shared secrets	Both	PPE
Download authorization key	Both	PPE VDE administrator
External communication keys and other info	Both	PPE Secure Database
Administrative object keys	Both	Permission record
Stationary object keys	Both	Permission record
Traveling object shared keys	Both	Permission record
Secure database keys	Both	PPE
Private body keys	Both	Secure database Some objects
Content keys	Both	Secure database Some objects
Authorization shared secrets	Both	Permission record
Secure Database Back up keys	Both	PPE Secure database

Master Keys

A "master" key is a key used to encrypt other keys. An initial or "master" key may be provided within PPE 650 for communicating other keys in a secure way. During initialization of PPE 650, code and shared keys are downloaded to the PPE. Since the code contains secure convolution algorithms and/or coefficients, it is comparable to a "master key." The shared keys may also be considered "master keys."

If public-key cryptography is used as the basis for external communication with PPE 650, then a master key is required during the PPE Public-key pair certification process. This master key may be, for example, a private key used by the manufacturer or VDE administrator to establish the digital certificate (encrypted public key and other information of the PPE), or it may, as another example, be a private key used by a VDE administrator to encrypt the entries in a certification repository. Once certification has occurred, external communications between PPEs 650 may be established using the certificates of communicating PPEs.

If shared secret keys are used as the basis for external communications, then an initial secret key is required to establish external communications for PPE 650 initialization. This initial secret key is a "master key" in the sense that it is

used to encrypt other keys. A set of shared partial external communications keys (see discussion above) may be downloaded during the PPE initialization process, and these keys are used to establish subsequent external PPE communications.

Manufacturing Key

A manufacturing key is used at the time of PPE manufacture to prevent knowledge by the manufacturing staff of PPE-specific key information that is downloaded into a PPE at initialization time. For example, a PPE 650 that operates as part of the manufacturing facility may generate information for download into the PPE being initialized. This information must be encrypted during communication between the PPEs 650 to keep it confidential, or otherwise the manufacturing staff could read the information. A manufacturing key is used to protect the information. The manufacturing key may be used to protect various other keys downloaded into the PPE such as, for example, a certification private key, a PPE public/private key pair, and/or other keys such as shared secret keys specific to the PPE. Since the manufacturing key is used to encrypt other keys, it is a "master key."

A manufacturing key may be public-key based, or it may be based on a shared secret. Once the information is downloaded, the now-initialized PPE 650 can discard (or simply not use) the

manufacturing key. A manufacturing key may be hardwired into PPE 650 at manufacturing time, or sent to the PPE as its first key and discarded after it is no longer needed. As indicated in the table above and in the preceding discussion, a manufacturing key is not required if PK capabilities are included in the PPE.

Certification Key Pair

A certification key pair may be used as part of a "certification" process for PPEs 650 and VDE electronic appliances 600. This certification process in the preferred embodiment may be used to permit a VDE electronic appliance to present one or more "certificates" authenticating that it (or its key) can be trusted. As described above, this "certification" process may be used by one PPE 650 to "certify" that it is an authentic VDE PPE, it has a certain level of security and capability set (e.g., it is hardware based rather than merely software based), etc. Briefly, the "certification" process may involve using a certificate private key of a certification key pair to encrypt a message including another VDE node's public-key. The private key of a certification key pair is preferably used to generate a PPE certificate. It is used to encrypt a public-key of the PPE. A PPE certificate can either be stored in the PPE, or it may be stored in a certification repository.

Depending on the authentication technique chosen, the public key and the private key of a certification key pair may need to be protected. In the preferred embodiment, the certification public key(s) is distributed amongst PPEs such that they may make use of them in decrypting certificates as an aspect of authentication. Since, in the preferred embodiment, this public key is used inside a PPE 650, there is no need for this public key to be available in plaintext, and in any event it is important that such key be maintained and transmitted with integrity (e.g., during initialization and/or update by a VDE administrator). If the certification public key is kept confidential (i.e., only available in plaintext inside the PPE 650), it may make cracking security much more difficult. The private key of a certification key pair should be kept confidential and only be stored by a certifying authority (i.e., should not be distributed).

In order to allow, in the preferred embodiment, the ability to differentiate installations with different levels/degrees of trustedness/security, different certification key pairs may be used (e.g., different certification keys may be used to certify SPEs 503 then are used to certify HPEs 655).

PPE Public/Private Key Pair

In the preferred embodiment, each PPE 650 may have its own unique "device" (and/or user) public/private key pair.

Preferably, the private key of this key pair is generated within the PPE and is never exposed in any form outside of the PPE. Thus, in one embodiment, the PPE 650 may be provided with an internal capability for generating key pairs internally. If the PPE generates its own public-key crypto-system key pairs internally, a manufacturing key discussed above may not be needed. If desired, however, for cost reasons a key pair may be exposed only at the time a PPE 650 is manufactured, and may be protected at that time using a manufacturing key. Allowing PPE 650 to generate its public key pair internally allows the key pair to be concealed, but may in some applications be outweighed by the cost of putting a public-key key pair generator into PPE 650.

Initial Secret Key

The initial secret key is used as a master key by a secret key only based PPE 650 to protect information downloaded into the PPE during initialization. It is generated by the PPE 650, and is sent from the PPE to a secure manufacturing database encrypted using a manufacturing key. The secure database sends back a unique PPE manufacturing ID encrypted using the initial secret key in response.

The initial secret key is likely to be a much longer key than keys used for "standard" encryption due to its special role in PPE initialization. Since the resulting decryption overhead occurs

only during the initialization process, multiple passes through the decryption hardware with selected portions of this key are tolerable.

PPE Manufacturing ID

The PPE manufacturing ID is not a "key," but does fall within the classic definition of a "shared secret." It preferably uniquely identifies a PPE 650 and may be used by the secure database 610 to determine the PPE's initial secret key during the PPE initialization process.

Site ID, Shared Code, Shared Keys and Shared Secrets

The VDE site ID along with shared code, keys and secrets are preferably either downloaded into PPE 650 during the PPE initialization process, or are generated internally by a PPE as part of that process. In the preferred embodiment, most or all of this information is downloaded.

The PPE site ID uniquely identifies the PPE 650. The site ID is preferably unique so as to uniquely identify the PPE 650 and distinguish that PPE from all other PPEs. The site ID in the preferred embodiment provides a unique address that may be used for various purposes, such as for example to provide "address privacy" functions. In some cases, the site ID may be the public key of the PPE 650. In other cases, the PPE site ID

may be assigned during the manufacturing and/or initialization process. In the case of a PPE 650 that is not public-key-capable, it would not be desirable to use the device secret key as the unique site ID because this would expose too many bits of the key—and therefore a different information string should be used as the site ID.

Shared code comprises those code fragments that provide at least a portion of the control program for the PPE 650. In the preferred embodiment, a basic code fragment is installed during PPE manufacturing that permits the PPE to bootstrap and begin the initialization process. This fragment can be replaced during the initialization process, or during subsequent download processing, with updated control logic.

Shared keys may be downloaded into PPE 650 during the initialization process. These keys may be used, for example, to decrypt the private headers of many object structures.

When PPE 650 is operating in a secret key only mode, the initialization and download processes may import shared secrets into the PPE 650. These shared secrets may be used during communications processes to permit PPEs 650 to authenticate the identity of other PPEs and/or users.

Download Authorization Key

The download authorization key is received by PPE 650 during the initialization download process. It is used to authorize further PPE 650 code updates, key updates, and may also be used to protect PPE secure database 610 backup to allow recovery by a VDE administrator (for example) if the PPE fails. It may be used along with the site ID, time and convolution algorithm to derive a site ID specific key. The download authorization key may also be used to encrypt the key block used to encrypt secure database 610 backups. It may also be used to form a site specific key that is used to enable future downloads to the PPE 650. This download authorization key is not shared among all PPEs 650 in the preferred embodiment; it is specific to functions performed by authorized VDE administrators.

External Communications Keys and Related Secret and Public Information

There are several cases where keys are required when PPEs 650 communicate. The process of establishing secure communications may also require the use of related public and secret information about the communicating electronic appliances 600. The external communication keys and other information are used to support and authenticate secure communications. These keys comprise a public-key pair in the

preferred embodiment although shared secret keys may be used alternatively or in addition.

Administrative Object Keys

In the preferred embodiment, an administrative object shared key may be used to decrypt the private header of an administrative object 870. In the case of administrative objects, a permissions record 808 may be present in the private header. In some cases, the permissions record 808 may be distributed as (or within) an administrative object that performs the function of providing a right to process the content of other administrative objects. The permissions record 808 preferably contains the keys for the private body, and the keys for the content that can be accessed would be budgets referenced in that permissions record 808. The administrative object shared keys may incorporate time as a component, and may be replaced when expired.

Stationary Object Keys

A stationary object shared key may be used to decrypt a private header of stationary objects 850. As explained above, in some cases a permissions record 808 may be present in the private header of stationary objects. If present, the permissions record 808 may contain the keys for the private body but will not contain the keys for the content. These shared keys may

incorporate time as a component, and may be replaced when expired.

Traveling Object Shared Keys

A traveling object shared key may be used to decrypt the private header of traveling objects 860. In the preferred embodiment, traveling objects contain permissions record 808 in their private headers. The permissions record 808 preferably contains the keys for the private body and the keys for the content that can be accessed as permitted by the permissions record 808. These shared keys may incorporate time as a component, and may be replaced when expired.

Secure Database Keys

PPE 650 preferably generates these secure database keys and never exposes them outside of the PPE. They are site-specific in the preferred embodiment, and may be "aged" as described above. As described above, each time an updated record is written to secure database 610, a new key may be used and kept in a key list within the PPE. Periodically (and when the internal list has no more room), the PPE 650 may generate a new key to encrypt new or old records. A group of keys may be used instead of a single key, depending on the size of the secure database 610.

Private Body Keys

Private body keys are unique to an object 300, and are not dependent on key information shared between PPEs 650. They are preferably generated by the PPE 650 at the time the private body is encrypted, and may incorporate real-time as a component to "age" them. They are received in permissions records 808, and their usage may be controlled by budgets.

Content Keys

Content Keys are unique to an object 300, and are not dependent on key information shared between PPEs 650. They are preferably generated by the PPE 650 at the time the content is encrypted. They may incorporate time as a component to "age" them. They are received in permissions records 808, and their usage may be controlled by budgets.

Authorization Shared Secrets

Access to and use of information within a PPE 650 or within a secure database 610 may be controlled using authorization "shared secrets" rather than keys. Authorization shared secrets may be stored within the records they authorize (permissions records 808, budget records, etc.). The authorization shared secret may be formulated when the corresponding record is created. Authorization shared secrets can be generated by an authorizing PPE 650, and may be

replaced when record updates occur. Authorization shared secrets have some characteristics associated with "capabilities" used in capabilities based operating systems. Access tags (described below) are an important set of authorization shared secrets in the preferred embodiment.

Backup Keys

As described above, the secure database 610 backup consists of reading all secure database records and current audit "roll ups" stored in both PPE 650 and externally. Then, the backup process decrypts and re-encrypts this information using a new set of generated keys. These keys, the time of the backup, and other appropriate information to identify the backup, may be encrypted multiple times and stored with the previously encrypted secure database files and roll up data within the backup files. These files may then all be encrypted using a "backup key" that is generated and stored within PPE 650. This backup key 500 may be used by the PPE to recover a backup if necessary. The backup keys may also be securely encrypted (e.g., using a download authentication key and/or a VDE administrator public key) and stored within the backup itself to permit a VDE administrator to recover the backup in case of PPE 650 failure.

Cryptographic Sealing

Sealing is used to protect the integrity of information when it may be subjected to modifications outside the control of the PPE 650, either accidentally or as an attack on the VDE security. Two specific applications may be the computation of check values for database records and the protection of data blocks that are swapped out of an SPE 500.

There are two types of sealing: keyless sealing, also known as cryptographic hashing, and keyed sealing. Both employ a cryptographically strong hash function, such as MD5 or SHA. Such a function takes an input of arbitrary size and yields a fixed-size hash, or "digest." The digest has the property that it is infeasible to compute two inputs that yield the same digest, and infeasible to compute one input that yields a specific digest value, where "infeasible" is with reference to a work factor based on the size of the digest value in bits. If, for example, a 256-bit hash function is to be called strong, it must require approximately on average 10^{38} (2^{128}) trials before a duplicated or specified digest value is likely to be produced.

Keyless seals may be employed as check values in database records (e.g., in PERC 808) and similar applications. A keyless seal may be computed based on the content of the body of the record, and the seal stored with the rest of the record. The

combination of seal and record may be encrypted to protect it in storage. If someone modifies the encrypted record without knowing the encryption key (either in the part representing the data or the part representing the seal), the decrypted content will be different, and the decrypted check value will not match the digest computed from the record's data. Even though the hash algorithm is known, it is not feasible to modify both the record's data and its seal to correspond because both are encrypted.

Keyed seals may be employed as protection for data stored outside a protected environment without encryption, or as a validity proof between two protected environments. A keyed seal is computed similarly to a keyless seal, except that a secret initial value is logically prefixed to the data being sealed. The digest value thus depends both on the secret and the data, and it is infeasible to compute a new seal to correspond to modified data even though the data itself is visible to an attacker. A keyed seal may protect data in storage with a single secret value, or may protect data in transit between two environments that share a single secret value.

The choice of keys or keyless seals depends on the nature of the data being protected and whether it is additionally protected by encryption.

Tagging

Tagging is particularly useful for supporting the secure storage of important component assembly and related information on secondary storage memory 652. Integrated use of information "tagging" and encryption strategies allows use of inexpensive mass storage devices to securely store information that, in part enables, limits and/or records the configuration, management and operation of a VDE node and the use of VDE protected content.

When encrypted or otherwise secured information is delivered into a user's secure VDE processing area (e.g., PPE 650), a portion of this information can be used as a "tag" that is first decrypted or otherwise unsecured and then compared to an expected value to confirm that the information represents expected information. The tag thus can be used as a portion of a process confirming the identity and correctness of received, VDE protected, information.

Three classes of tags that may be included in the control structures of the preferred embodiment:

- access tags
- validation tags
- correlation tags.

These tags have distinct purposes.

An access tag may be used as a "shared secret" between VDE protected elements and entities authorized to read and/or modify the tagged element(s). The access tag may be broken into separate fields to control different activities independently. If an access tag is used by an element such as a method core 1000', administrative events that affect such an element must include the access tag (or portion of the access tag) for the affected element(s) and assert that tag when an event is submitted for processing. If access tags are maintained securely (e.g., created inside a PPE 650 when the elements are created, and only released from PPE 650 in encrypted structures), and only distributed to authorized parties, modification of structures can be controlled more securely. Of course, control structures (e.g., PERCs 808) may further limit or qualify modifications or other actions expressed in administrative events.

Correlation tags are used when one element references another element. For example, a creator might be required by a budget owner to obtain permission and establish a business relationship prior to referencing their budget within the creator's PERCs. After such relationship was formed, the budget owner might transmit one or more correlation tags to the creator as one aspect of allowing the creator to produce PERCs that reference the budget owner's budget.

Validation tags may be used to help detect record substitution attempts on the part of a tamperer.

In some respects, these three classes of tags overlap in function. For example, a correlation tag mismatch may prevent some classes of modification attempts that would normally be prevented by an access tag mismatch before an access tag check is performed. The preferred embodiment may use this overlap in some cases to reduce overhead by, for example, using access tags in a role similar to validation tags as described above.

In general, tagging procedures involve changing, within SPE 503, encryption key(s), securing techniques(s), and/or providing specific, stored tag(s). These procedures can be employed with secure database 610 information stored on said inexpensive mass storage 652 and used within a hardware SPU 500 for authenticating, decrypting, or otherwise analyzing, using and making available VDE protected content and management database information. Normally, changing validation tags involves storing within a VDE node hardware (e.g., the PPE 650) one or more elements of information corresponding to the tagging changes. Storage of information outside of the hardware SPE's physically secure, trusted environment is a highly cost savings means of secure storage, and the security of important stored management database information is enhanced by this tagging of

information. Performing this tagging "change" frequently (for example, every time a given record is decrypted) prevents the substitution of "incorrect" information for "correct" information, since said substitution will not carry information which will match the tagging information stored within the hardware SPE during subsequent retrieval of the information.

Another benefit of information tagging is the use of tags to help enforce and/or verify information and/or control mechanisms in force between two or more parties. If information is tagged by one party, and then passed to another party or parties, a tag can be used as an expected value associated with communications and/or transactions between the two parties regarding the tagged information. For example, if a tag is associated with a data element that is passed by Party A to Party B, Party B may require Party A to prove knowledge of the correct value of at least a portion of a tag before information related to, and/or part of, said data element is released by Party B to Party A, or vice versa. In another example, a tag may be used by Party A to verify that information sent by Party B is actually associated with, and/or part of, a tagged data element, or vice versa.

Establishing A Secure, Authenticated, Communication Channel

From time to time, two parties (e.g., PPEs A and B), will need to establish a communication channel that is known by both

parties to be secure from eavesdropping, secure from tampering, and to be in use solely by the two parties whose identities are correctly known to each other.

The following describes an example process for establishing such a channel and identifies how the requirements for security and authentication may be established and validated by the parties. The process is described in the abstract, in terms of the claims and belief each party must establish, and is not to be taken as a specification of any particular protocol. In particular, the individual sub-steps of each step are not required to be implemented using distinct operations; in practice, the establishment and validation of related proofs is often combined into a single operation.

The sub-steps need not be performed in the order detailed below, except to the extent that the validity of a claim cannot be proven before the claim is made by the other party. The steps may involve additional communications between the two parties than are implied by the enumerated sub-steps, as the "transmission" of information may itself be broken into sub-steps. Also, it is not necessary to protect the claims or the proofs from disclosure or modification during transmission. Knowledge of the claims (including the specific communication proposals and acknowledgements thereof) is not considered protected

information. Any modification of the proofs will cause the proofs to become invalid and will cause the process to fail.

Standard public-key or secret-key cryptographic techniques can be used to implement this process (e.g., X.509, Authenticated Diffie-Hellman, Kerberos). The preferred embodiment uses the three-way X.509 public key protocol steps.

The following may be the first two steps in the example process:

- A. (*precursor step*): Establish means of creating validatable claims by A
- B. (*precursor step*): Establish means of creating validatable claims by B

These two steps ensure that each party has a means of making claims that can be validated by the other party, for instance, by using a public key signature scheme in which both parties maintain a private key and make available a public key that itself is authenticated by the digital signature of a certification authority.

The next steps may be:

A (proposal step):

1. Determine B's identity

2. Acquire means of validating claims made by B
3. Create a unique identity for this specific proposed communication
4. Create a communication proposal identifying the parties and the specific communication
5. Create validatable proof of A's identity and the origin of the communication proposal
6. Deliver communication proposal and associated proof to B.

These steps establish the identity of the correspondent party B and proposes a communication. Because establishment of the communication will require validation of claims made by B, a means must be provided for A to validate such claims. Because the establishment of the communication must be unique to a specific requirement by A for communication, this communication proposal and all associated traffic must be unambiguously distinguishable from all other such traffic. Because B must validate the proposal as a legitimate proposal from A, a proof must be provided that the proposal is valid.

The next steps may be as follows:

B (acknowledgement step):

1. Extract A's identity from the communication proposal
2. Acquire means of validating claims made by A
3. Validate A's claim of identity and communication proposal origin
4. Determine the unique identification of the communication proposal
5. Determine that the communication proposal does not duplicate an earlier proposal
6. Create an acknowledgement identifying the specific communication proposal
7. Create validatable proof of B's identity and the origin of the acknowledgement
8. Deliver the acknowledgement and associated proof to A.

These steps establish that party B has received A's communication proposal and is prepared to act on it. Because B must validate the proposal, B must first determine its origin and validate its authenticity. B must ensure that its response is associated with a specific proposal, and that the proposal is not a replay. If B accepts the proposal, it must prove both B's own identity and that B has received a specific proposal.

The next steps may be:

A (establishment step):

1. Validate B's claim acknowledgement of A's specific proposal
2. Extract the identity of the specific communication proposal from the acknowledgement
3. Determine that the acknowledgement is associated with an outstanding communication proposal
4. Create unique session key to be used for the proposed communication
5. Create proof of session key's creation by A
6. Create proof of session key's association with the specific communication proposal
7. Create proof of receipt of B's acknowledgement
8. Protect the session key from disclosure in transmission
9. Protect the session key from modification in transmission
10. Deliver protected session key and all proofs to B.

These steps allows A to specify a session key to be associated with all further traffic related to A's specific communication proposal. A must create the key, prove that A created it, and prove that it is associated with the specific proposed communication. In addition, A must prove that the

session key is generated in response to B's acknowledgement of the proposal. The session key must be protected from disclosure of modification to ensure that an attacker cannot substitute a different value.

Transportability of VDE Installations Between PPEs 650

In a preferred embodiment, VDE objects 300 and other secure information may if appropriate, be transported from one PPE 650 to another securely using the various keys outlined above. VDE 100 uses redistribution of VDE administrative information to exchange ownership of VDE object 300, and to allow the portability of objects between electronic appliances 600.

The permissions record 808 of VDE objects 300 contains rights information that may be used to determine whether an object can be redistributed in whole, in part, or at all. If a VDE object 300 can be redistributed, then electronic appliance 600 normally must have a "budget" and/or other permissioning that allows it to redistribute the object. For example, an electronic appliance 600 authorized to redistribute an object may create an administrative object containing a budget or rights less than or equal to the budget or rights that it owns. Some administrative objects may be sent to other PPEs 650. A PPE 650 that receives one of the administrative objects may have the ability to use at least a portion of the budgets, or rights, to related objects.

Transfer of ownership of a VDE object 300 is a special case in which all of the permissions and/or budgets for a VDE object are redistributed to a different PPE 650. Some VDE objects may require that all object-related information be delivered (e.g., it's possible to "sell" all rights to the object). However, some VDE objects 300 may prohibit such a transfer. In the case of ownership transfer, the original providers for a VDE object 300 may need to be contacted by the new owner, informed of the transfer, and validated using an authorization shared secret that accompanies reauthorization, before transfer of ownership can be completed.

When an electronic appliance 600 receives a component assembly, an encrypted part of the assembly may contain a value that is known only to the party or PPE 650 that supplied the assembly. This value may be saved with information that must eventually returned to the assembly supplier (e.g., audit, billing and related information). When a component supplier requests that information be reported, the value may be provided by the supplier so that the local electronic appliance 600 can check it against the originally supplied value to ensure that the request is legitimate. When a new component is received, the value may be checked against an old component to determine whether the new component is legitimate (e.g., the new value for use in the next report process may be included with the new component).

Integrity of VDE Security

There are many ways in which a PPE 650 might be compromised. The goal of the security provided by VDE 100 is to reduce the possibility that the system will be compromised, and minimize the adverse effects if it is compromised.

The basic cryptographic algorithm that are used to implement VDE 100 are assumed to be safe (cryptographically strong). These include the secret-key encryption of content, public-key signatures for integrity verification, public-key encryption for privacy between PPEs 650 or between a PPE and a VDE administrator, etc. Direct attack on these algorithms is assumed to be beyond the capabilities of an attacker. For domestic versions of VDE 100 some of this is probably a safe assumption since the basic building blocks for control information have sufficiently long keys and are sufficiently proven.

The following risks of threat or attacks may be significant:

- Unauthorized creation or modification of component assemblies (e.g., budgets)
- Unauthorized bulk disclosure of content
- Compromise of one or more keys
- Software emulation of a hardware PPE
- Substitution of older records in place of newer records

- Introduction of "rogue" (i.e., unauthentic) load modules
- Replay attacks
- Defeating "fingerprinting"
- Unauthorized disclosure of individual content items
- Redistribution of individual content items.

A significant potential security breach would occur if one or more encryption keys are compromised. As discussed above, however, the encryption keys used by VDE 100 are sufficiently varied and compartmentalized so that compromising one key would have only limited value to an attacker in most cases. For example, if a certification private key is exposed, an attacker could pass the challenge/response protocol as discussed above but would then confront the next level of security that would entail cracking either the initialization challenge/response or the external communication keys. If the initialization challenge/response security is also defeated, the initialization code and various initialization keys would also be exposed. However, it would still be necessary to understand the code and data to find the shared VDE keys and to duplicate the key-generation ("convolution") algorithms. In addition, correct real time clock values must be maintained by the spoof. If the attacker is able to accomplish all of this successfully, then all secure communications to the bogus PPE would be compromised.

An object would be compromised if communications related to the permissions record 808 of that object are sent to the bogus PPE.

Knowledge of the PPE download authorization key and the algorithms that are used to derive the key that encrypts the keys for backup of secured database 610 would compromise the entire secured database at a specific electronic appliance 600. However, in order to use this information to compromise content of VDE objects 300, an understanding of appropriate VDE internals would also be required. In a preferred embodiment, the private body keys and content keys stored in a secured database 610 are "aged" by including a time component. Time is convoluted with the stored values to derive the "true keys" needed to decrypt content. If this process is also compromised, then object content or methods would be revealed. Since a backup of secured database 610 is not ever restored to a PPE 650 in the preferred embodiment without the intervention of an authorized VDE administrator, a "bogus" PPE would have to be used to make use of this information.

External communication shared keys are used in the preferred embodiment in conjunction with a key convolution algorithm based on site ID and time. If compromised, all of the steps necessary to allow communications with PPEs 650 must also be known to take advantage of this knowledge. In addition,

at least one of the administrative object shared keys must be compromised to gain access to a decrypted permissions record 808.

Compromising an administrative object shared key has no value unless the "cracker" also has knowledge of external communication keys. All administrative objects are encrypted by unique keys exchanged using the shared external communications keys, site ID and time. Knowledge of PPE 650 internal details would be necessary to further decrypt the content of administrative objects.

The private header of a stationary object (or any other stationary object that uses the same shared key) if compromised, may provide the attacker with access to content until the shared key "ages" enough to no longer decrypt the private header. Neither the private body nor the content of the object is exposed unless a permissions record 808 for that object is also compromised. The private headers of these objects may remain compromised until the key "ages" enough to no longer decrypt the private header.

Secure database encryption keys in the preferred embodiment are frequently changing and are also site specific. The consequences of compromising a secured database 610 file or

a record depends on the information that has been compromised. For example, permissions record 808 contain keys for the public body and content of a VDE object 300. If a permissions record 808 is compromised, the aspects of that object protected by the keys provided by the permissions record are also compromised—if the algorithm that generates the "true keys" is also known. If a private body key becomes known, the private body of the object is compromised until the key "ages" and expires. If the "aging" process for that key is also compromised, the breach is permanent. Since the private body may contain methods that are shared by a number of different objects, these methods may also become compromised. When the breach is detected, all administrative objects that provide budgets and permissions record should update the compromised methods. Methods stored in secure database 610 are only replaced by more recent versions, so the compromised version becomes unusable after the update is completed.

If a content key becomes compromised, the portion of the content encrypted with the key is also compromised until the key "ages" and expires. If the "aging" process for that key also becomes compromised, then the breach becomes permanent. If multiple levels of encryption are used, or portions of the content are encrypted with different keys, learning a single key would be insufficient to release some or all of the content.

If an authorization shared secret (e.g., an access tag) becomes known, the record containing the secret may be modified by an authorized means if the "cracker" knows how to properly use the secret. Generally speaking, the external communications keys, the administrative object keys and the management file keys must also be "cracked" before a shared secret is useful. Of course, any detailed knowledge of the protocols would also be required to make use of this information.

In the preferred embodiment, PPE 650 may detect whether or not it has become compromised. For example, by comparing information stored in an SPE 503 (e.g., summary service information) with information stored in secure database 610 and/or transmitted to a VDE participant (e.g., a VDE clearinghouse), discrepancies may become evident. If PPE 650 (or a VDE administrator watching its activities or communicating with it) detects that it has been compromised, it may be updated with an initialization to use new code, keys and new encryption/decryption algorithms. This would limit exposure to VDE objects 300 that existed at the time the encryption scheme was broken. It is possible to require the PPE 650 to cease functioning after a certain period of time unless new code and key downloads occur. It is also possible to have VDE administrators force updates to occur. It is also likely that the

desire to acquire a new VDE object 300 will provide an incentive for users to update their PPEs 650 at regular time intervals.

Finally, the end-to-end nature of VDE applications, in which content 108 flows in one direction, generating reports and bills 118 in the other, makes it possible to perform "back-end" consistency checks. Such checks, performed in clearinghouses 116, can detect patterns of use that may or do indicate fraud (e.g., excessive acquisition of protected content without any corresponding payment, usage records without corresponding billing records). The fine grain of usage reporting and the ready availability of usage records and reports in electronic form enables sophisticated fraud detection mechanisms to be built so that fraud-related costs can be kept to an acceptable level.

PPE Initialization

Each PPE 650 needs to be initialized before it can be used. Initialization may occur at the manufacturer site, after the PPE 650 has been placed out in the field, or both. The manufacturing process for PPE 650 typically involves embedding within the PPE sufficient software that will allow the device to be more completely initialized at a later time. This manufacturing process may include, for example, testing the bootstrap loader and challenge-response software permanently stored within PPE 650, and loading the PPE's unique ID. These steps provide a

basic VDE-capable PPE 650 that may be further initialized (e.g., after it has been installed within an electronic appliance 600 and placed in the field). In some cases, the manufacturing and further initialization processes may be combined to produce "VDE ready" PPEs 650. This description elaborates on the summary presented above with respect to Figures 64 and 65.

Figure 68 shows an example of steps that may be performed in accordance with one preferred embodiment to initialize a PPE 650. Some of the steps shown in this flowchart may be performed at the manufacturing site, and some may be performed remotely through contact between a VDE administrator and the PPE 650. Alternatively, all of the steps shown in the diagram may be performed at the manufacturing site, or all of the steps shown may be performed through remote communications between the PPE 500 and a VDE administrator.

If the initialization process 1370 is being performed at the manufacturer, PPE 650 may first be attached to a testbed. The manufacturing testbed may first reset the PPE 650 (e.g., with a power on clear) (Block 1372). If this reset is being performed at the manufacturer, then the PPE 650 preferably executes a special testbed bootstrap code that completely tests the PPE operation from a software standpoint and fails if something is wrong with the PPE. A secure communications exchange may

then be established between the manufacturing testbed and the PPE 650 using an initial challenge-response interaction (Block 1374) that is preferably provided as part of the testbed bootstrap process. Once this secure communications has been established, the PPE 650 may report the results of the bootstrap tests it has performed to the manufacturing testbed. Assuming the PPE 650 has tested successfully, the manufacturing testbed may download new code into the PPE 650 to update its internal bootstrap code (Block 1376) so that it does not go through the testbed bootstrap process upon subsequent resets (Block 1376). The manufacturing testbed may then load new firmware into the PPE internal non-volatile memory in order to provide additional standard and/or customized capabilities (Block 1378). For example, the manufacturing testbed may preload PPE 650 with the load modules appropriate for the particular manufacturing lot. This step permits the PPE 500 to be customized at the factory for specific applications.

The manufacturing testbed may next load a unique device ID into PPE 650 (Block 1380). PPE 650 now carries a unique ID that can be used for further interactions.

Blocks 1372-1380R typically are, in the preferred embodiment, performed at the manufacturing site. Blocks 1374

and 1382-1388 may be performed either at the manufacturing site, after the PPE 650 has been deployed, or both.

To further initialize PPE 650, once a secure communications has been established between the PPE and the manufacturing testbed or a VDE administrator (Block 1374), any required keys, tags or certificates are loaded into PPE 650 (Block 1382). For example, the manufacturing test bed may load its information into PPE 650 so the PPE may be initialized at a later time. Some of these values may be generated internally within PPE 650. The manufacturing testbed or VDE administrator may then initialize the PPE real time clock 528 to the current real time value (Block 1384). This provides a time and date reference for the PPE 650. The manufacturing testbed or the VDE administrator may next initialize the summary values maintained internally to the PPE 500 (Block 1386). If the PPE 650 is already installed as part of an electronic appliance 600, the PPE may at this point initialize its secure database 610 (Block 1388).

Figure 69 shows an example of program control steps performed by PPE 650 as part of a firmware download process (See Figure 68, Block 1378). The PPE download process is used to load externally provided firmware and/or data elements into the PPE. Firmware loads may take two forms: permanent loads

for software that remains resident in the PPE 650; and transient loads for software that is being loaded for execution. A related process for storing into the secure database 610 is performed for elements that have been sent to a VDE electronic appliance 600.

PPE 650 automatically performs several checks to ensure that firmware being downloaded into the PPE has not been tampered with, replaced, or substituted before it was loaded. The download routine 1390 shown in the figure illustrates an example of such checks. Once the PPE 650 has received a new firmware item (Block 1392), it may check the item to ensure that it decrypts properly using the predetermined download or administrative object key (depending on the source of the element) (decision Block 1394). If the firmware decrypts properly ("yes" exits to decision Block 1394), the firmware as check valve may be calculated and compared against the check valve stored under the encryption wrapper of the firmware (decision Block 1396). If the two check summed values compare favorably ("yes" exit to decision Block 1396), then the PPE 650 may compare the public and private header identification tags associated with the firmware to ensure that the proper firmware was provided and had not been substituted (step not shown in the figure).

Assuming this test also passes, the PPE 500 may calculate the digital signatures of the firmware (assuming digital signatures are supported by the PPE 650 and the firmware is "signed") and

may check the calculated signature to ensure that it compares favorably to the digital signatures under the firmware encryption wrapper (Blocks 1398, 1400). If any of these tests fail, then the download will be aborted ("fail" termination 1401).

Assuming all of the tests described above pass, then PPE 650 determines whether the firmware is to be stored within the PPE (e.g., an internal non-volatile memory), or whether it is to be stored in the secure database 610 (decision Block 1402). If the firmware is to be stored within the PPE ("yes" exit to decision Block 1402), then the PPE 500 may simply store the information internally (Block 1404). If the firmware is to be stored within the secure database 610 ("no" exit to decision Block 1402), then the firmware may be tagged with a unique PPE-specific tag designed to prevent record substitution (Block 1406), and the firmware may then be encrypted using the appropriate secure database key and released to the secure database 610 (Block 1408).

Networking SPUs 500 and/or VDE Electronic Appliances 600

In the context of many computers interconnected by a local or wide area network, it would be possible for one or a few of them to be VDE electronic appliances 600. For example, a VDE-capable server might include one or more SPUs 500. This centralized VDE server could provide all VDE services required within the network or it can share VDE service with VDE server

nodes; that is, it can perform a few, some, or most VDE service activities. For example, a user's non-VDE computer could issue a request over the network for VDE-protected content. In response to the request, the VDE server could comply by accessing the appropriate VDE object 300, releasing the requested content and delivering the content over the network 672 to the requesting user. Such an arrangement would allow VDE capabilities to be easily integrated into existing networks without requiring modification or replacement of the various computers and other devices connected to the networks.

For example, a VDE server having one or more protected processing environments 650 could communicate over a network with workstations that do not have a protected processing environment. The VDE server could perform all secure VDE processing, and release resulting content and other information to the workstations on the network. This arrangement would require no hardware or software modification to the workstations.

However, some applications may require greater security, flexibility and/or performance that may be obtained by providing multiple VDE electronic appliances 600 connected to the same network 672. Because commonly-used local area networks constitute an insecure channel that may be subject to tampering

and/or eavesdropping, it is desirable in most secure applications to protect the information communicated across the network. It would be possible to use conventional network security techniques to protect VDE-released content or other VDE information communicated across a network 672 between a VDE electronic appliance 600 and a non-VDE electronic appliance. However, advantages are obtained by providing multiple networked VDE electronic appliances 600 within the same system.

As discussed above in connection with Figure 8, multiple VDE electronic appliances 600 may communicate with one another over a network 672 or other communications path. Such networking of VDE electronic appliances 600 can provide advantages. Advantages include, for example, the possibility of centralizing VDE resources, storing and/or archiving metering information on a server VDE and delivering information and services efficiently across the network 672 to multiple electronic appliances 600.

For example, in a local area network topology, a "VDE server" electronic appliance 600 could store VDE-protected information and make it available to one or more additional electronic appliances 600 or computers that may communicate with the server over network 672. As one example, an object

repository 728 storing VDE objects could be maintained at the centralized server, and each of many networked electronic appliance 600 users could access the centralized object repository over the network 672 as needed. When a user needs to access a particular VDE object 300, her electronic appliance 600 could issue a request over network 672 to obtain a copy of the object. The "VDE server" could deliver all or a portion of the requested object 300 in response to the request. Providing such a centralized object repository 728 would have the advantage of minimizing mass storage requirements local to each electronic appliance 600 connected to the network 672, eliminate redundant copies of the same information, ease information management burdens, provide additional physical and/or other security for particularly important VDE processes and/or information occurring at the server, where providing such security at VDE nodes may be commercially impractical for certain business models, etc.

It may also be desirable to centralize secure database 610 in a local area network topology. For example, in the context of a local area network, a secure database 610 server could be provided at a centralized location. Each of several electronic appliances 600 connected to a local area network 672 could issue requests for secure database 610 records over the network, and receive those records via the network. The records could be

provided over the network in encrypted form. "Keys" needed to decrypt the records could be shared by transmitting them across the network in secure communication exchanges. Centralizing secure database 610 in a network 672 has potential advantages of minimizing or eliminating secondary storage and/or other memory requirements for each of the networked electronic appliances 600, avoiding redundant information storage, allowing centralized backup services to be provided, easing information management burdens, etc.

One way to inexpensively and conveniently deploy multiple instances of VDE electronic appliances 600 across a network would be to provide network workstations with software defining an HPE 655. This arrangement requires no hardware modification of the workstations; an HPE 655 can be defined using software only. An SPE(s) 503 and/or HPE(s) 655 could also be provided within a VDE server. This arrangement has the advantage of allowing distributed VDE network processing without requiring workstations to be customized or modified (except for loading a new program(s) into them). VDE functions requiring high levels of security may be restricted to an SPU-based VDE server. "Secure" HPE-based workstations could perform VDE functions requiring less security, and could also coordinate their activities with the VDE server.

Thus, it may be advantageous to provide multiple VDE electronic appliances 600 within the same network. It may also be advantageous to provide multiple VDE electronic appliances 600 within the same workstation or other electronic appliance 600. For example, an electronic appliance 600 may include multiple electronic appliances 600 each of which have a SPU 500 and are capable of performing VDE functions.

For example, one or more VDE electronic appliances 600 can be used as input/output device(s) of a computer system. This may eliminate the need to decrypt information in one device and then move it in unencrypted form across some bus or other unsecured channel to another device such as a peripheral. If the peripheral device itself is a VDE electronic appliance 600 having a SPU 500, VDE-protected information may be securely sent to the peripheral across the insecure channel for processing (e.g., decryption) at the peripheral device. Giving the peripheral device the capability of handling VDE-protected information directly also increases flexibility. For example, the VDE electronic appliance 600 peripheral device may control VDE object 300 usage. It may, for example, meter the usage or other parameters associated with the information it processes, and it may gather audit trials and other information specific to the processing it performs in order to provide greater information gathering about VDE object usage. Providing multiple

cooperating VDE electronic appliances 600 may also increase performance by eliminating the need to move encrypted information to a VDE electronic appliance 600 and then move it again in unencrypted form to a non-VDE device. The VDE-protected information can be moved directly to its destination device which, if VDE-capable, may directly process it without requiring involvement by some other VDE electronic appliance 600.

Figure 70 shows an example of an arrangement 2630 comprising multiple VDE electronic appliances 600(1), 600(2), 600(3), . . . , 600(N). VDE electronic appliances 600(1) . . . 600(N) may communicate with one another over a communications path 2631 (e.g., the system bus of a work station, a telephone or other wire, a cable, a backplane, a network 672, or any other communications mechanism). Each of the electronic appliances 600 shown in the figure may have the same general architecture shown in Figure 8, i.e., they may each include a CPU (or microcontroller) 654, SPU 500, RAM 656, ROM 658, and system bus 653. Each of the electronic appliances 600 shown in the figure may have an interface/controller 2632 (which may be considered to be a particular kind of I/O controller 660 and/or communications controller 666 shown in Figure 8). This interface/controller 2632 provides an interface between the electronic appliance system bus 653 and an appropriate electrical

connector 2634. Electrical connectors 2634 of each of the respective electronic appliances 600(1), . . . 600(N) provide a connection to a common network 672 or other communication paths.

Although each of electronic appliances 600 shown in the figure may have a generally similar architecture, they may perform different specialized tasks. For example, electronic appliance 600(1) might comprise a central processing section of a workstation responsible for managing the overall operation of the workstation and providing computation resources. Electronic appliance 600(2) might be a mass storage device 620 for the same workstation, and could provide a storage mechanism 2636 that might, for example, read information from and write information to a secondary storage device 652. Electronic appliance 600(3) might be a display device 614 responsible for performing display tasks, and could provide a displaying mechanism 2638 such as a graphics controller and associated video or other display. Electronic appliance 600(N) might be a printer 622 that performs printing related tasks and could include, for example, a print mechanism 2640.

Each of electronic appliances 600(1), . . . 600(N) could comprise a different module of the same workstation device all contained within a common housing, or the different electronic

appliances could be located within different system components. For example, electronic appliance 600(2) could be disposed within a disk controller unit, electronic appliance 600(3) could be disposed within a display device 614 housing, and the electronic appliance 600(N) could be disposed within the housing of a printer 622. Referring back to Figure 7, scanner 626, modem 618, telecommunication means 624, keyboard 612 and/or voice recognition box 613 could each comprise a VDE electronic appliance 600 having its own SPU 500. Additional examples include RF or otherwise wireless interface controller, a serial interface controller, LAN controllers, MPEG (video) controllers, etc.

Because electronic appliances 600(1) . . . 600(N) are each VDE-capable, they each have the ability to perform encryption and/or decryption of VDE-protected information. This means that information communicated across network 672 or other communications path 2631 connecting the electronic appliances can be VDE-protected (e.g., it may be packaged in the form of VDE administrative and/or content objects and encrypted as discussed above). One of the consequences of this arrangement is that an eavesdropper who taps into communications path 2631 will not be able obtain information except in VDE-protected form. For example, information generated by electronic appliance 600(1) to be printed could be packaged in a VDE content object 300

and transmitted over path 2631 to electronic appliance 600 (N) for printing. An attacker would gain little benefit from intercepting this information since it is transmitted in protected form; she would have to compromise electronic appliance 600(1) or 600(N) (or the SPU 500(1), 500(N)) in order to access this information in unprotected form.

Another advantage provided by the arrangement shown in the diagram is that each of electronic appliances 600(1), . . . 600(N) may perform their own metering, control and/or other VDE-related functions. For example, electronic appliance 600(N) may meter and/or perform any other VDE control functions related to the information to be printed, electronic appliance 600(3) may meter and/or perform any other VDE control functions related to the information to be displayed, electronic appliance 600(2) may meter and/or perform any other VDE control functions related to the information to be stored and/or retrieved from mass storage 620, and electronic appliance 600(1) may meter and/or perform any other VDE control functions related to the information it processes.

In one specific arrangement, each of electronic appliances 600(1), . . . 600(N) would receive a command that indicates that the information received by or sent to the electronic appliance is to use its SPU 500 to process the information to follow. For

example, electronic appliance 600(N) might receive a command that indicates that information it is about to receive for printing is in VDE-protected form (or the information that is sent to it may itself indicate this). Upon receiving this command or other information, electronic appliance 600(N) may decrypt the received information using SPU 500, and might also meter the information the SPU provides to the print mechanism 2644 for printing. An additional command might be sent to electronic appliance 600(N) to disable the decryption process or 600(N)'s VDE secure subsystem may determine that the information should not be decrypted and/or printed. Additional commands, for example, may exist to load encryption/decryption keys, load "limits," establish "fingerprinting" requirements, and read metered usage. These additional commands may be sent in encrypted or unencrypted form as appropriate.

Suppose, for example, that electronic appliance 600(1) produces information it wishes to have printed by a VDE-capable printer 622. SPU 500(1) could establish a secure communications across path 2631 with SPU 500(N) to provide a command instructing SPU 500(N) to decrypt the next block of data and store it as a decryption key and a limit. SPU 500(1) might then send a further command to SPU 500(N) to use the decryption key and associated limit to process any following encrypted print stream (or this command could be sent by CPU 654(1) to

microcontroller 654(N)). Electronic appliance 600(1) could then begin sending encrypted information on path 672 for decryption and printing by printer 622. Upon receipt of each new block of information by printer 622, SPU 500(N) might first check to ensure that the limit is greater than zero. SPU 500(N) could then increment a usage meter value it maintains, and decrement the limit value. If the limit value is non-zero, SPU 500(N) could decrypt the information it has received and provide it to print mechanism 2640 for printing. If the limit is zero, then SPU 500(N) would not send the received information to the print mechanism 2640, nor would it decrypt it. Upon receipt of a command to stop, printer 622 could revert to a "non-secure" mode in which it would print everything received by it across path 2631 without permitting VDE processing.

The SPU 500(N) associated with printer 622 need not necessarily be disposed within the housing of the printer, but could instead be placed within an I/O controller 660 for example (see Figure 8). This would allow at least some of the advantages similar to the ones discussed above to be provided without requiring a special VDE-capable printer 622. Alternatively, a SPU 500(N) could be provided both within printer 622 and within I/O controller 660 communicating with the printer to provide advantages in terms of coordinating I/O control and relieving processing burdens from the SPU 500 associated with the central

processing electronic appliance 600(1). When multiple VDE instances occur within an electronic appliance, one or more VDE secure subsystems may be "central" subsystems, that is "secondary" VDE instances may pass encrypted usage related information to one or more central secure subsystems so as to allow said central subsystem to directly control storage of said usage related information. Certain control information may also be centrally stored by a central subsystem and all or a portion of such information may be securely provided to the secondary secure subsystem upon its secure VDE request.

Portable Electronic Appliance

Electronic appliance 600 provided by the present invention may be portable. Figure 71 shows one example of a portable electronic appliance 2600. Portable appliance 2600 may include a portable housing 2602 that may be about the size of a credit card in one example. Housing 2602 may connect to the outside world through, for example, an electrical connector 2604 having one or more electrical contact pins (not shown). Connector 2604 may electrically connect an external bus interface 2606 internal to housing 2602 to a mating connector 2604a of a host system 2608. External bus interface 2606 may, for example, comprise a PCMCIA (or other standard) bus interface to allow portable appliance 2600 to interface with and communicate over a bus 2607 of host system 2608. Host 2608 may, for example, be almost

any device imaginable, such as a computer, a pay telephone, another VDE electronic appliance 600, a television, an arcade video game, or a washing machine, to name a few examples.

Housing 2602 may be tamper resistant. (See discussion above relating to tamper resistance of SPU barrier 502.)

Portable appliance 2600 in the preferred embodiment includes one or more SPUs 500 that may be disposed within housing 2602. SPU 500 may be connected to external bus interface 2606 by a bus 2610 internal to housing 2602. SPU 500 communicates with host 2608 (through external bus interface 2606) over this internal bus 2610.

SPU 500 may be powered by a battery 2612 or other portable power supply that is preferably disposed within housing 2602. Battery 2612 may be, for example, a miniature battery of the type found in watches or credit card sized calculators.

Battery 2612 may be supplemented (or replaced) by solar cells, rechargeable batteries, capacitive storage cells, etc.

A random access memory (RAM) 2614 is preferably provided within housing 2602. RAM 2614 may be connected to SPU 500 and not directly connected to bus 2610, so that the contents of RAM 2614 may be accessed only by the SPU and not

by host 2608 (except through and as permitted by the SPU).

Looking at Figure 9 for a moment, RAM 2614 may be part of RAM 534 within the SPU 500, although it need not necessarily be contained within the same integrated circuit or other package that houses the rest of the SPU.

Portable appliance 2600 RAM 534 may contain, for example, information which can be used to uniquely identify each instance of the portable appliance. This information may be employed (e.g. as at least a portion of key or password information) in authentication, verification, decryption, and/or encryption processes.

Portable appliance 2600 may, in one embodiment, comprise means to perform substantially all of the functions of a VDE electronic appliance 600. Thus, for example, portable appliance 2600 may include the means for storing and using permissions, methods, keys, programs, and/or other information, and can be capable of operating as a "stand alone" VDE node.

In a further embodiment, portable appliance 2600 may perform preferred embodiment VDE functions once it has been coupled to an additional external electronic appliance 600. Certain information, such as database management permission(s), method(s), key(s), and/or other important

information (such as at least a portion of other VDE programs: administrative, user-interface, analysis, etc.) may be stored (for example as records) at an external VDE electronic appliance 600 that may share information with portable appliance 2600.

One possible "stand alone" configuration for tamper-resistant, portable appliance 2600 arrangements includes a tamper-resistant package (housing 2602) containing one or more processors (500, 2616) and/or other computing devices and/or other control logic, along with random-access-memory 2614. Processors 500, 2616 may execute permissions and methods wholly (or at least in part) within the portable appliance 2600. The portable appliance 2600 may have the ability to encrypt information before the information is communicated outside of the housing 2602 and/or decrypt received information when said received information is received from outside of the housing. This version would also possess the ability to store at least a portion of permission, method, and/or key information securely within said tamper resistant portable housing 2602 on non-volatile memory.

Another version of portable appliance 2600 may obtain permissions and/or methods and/or keys from a local VDE electronic appliance 600 external to the portable appliance 2600 to control, limit, or otherwise manage a user's use of a VDE

protected object. Such a portable appliance 600 may be contained within, received by, installed in, or directly connected to, another electronic appliance 2600.

One example of a "minimal" configuration of portable appliance 2600 would include only SPU 500 and battery 2612 within housing 2602 (the external bus interface 2606 and the RAM 2614 would in this case each be incorporated into the SPU block shown in the Figure). In other, enhanced examples of portable appliance 2600, any or all of the following optional components may also be included within housing 2602:

one or more CPUs 2616 (with associated support components such as RAM-ROM 2617, I/O controllers (not shown), etc.);

one or more display devices 2618;

one or more keypads or other user input buttons/control information 2620;

one or more removable/replaceable memory device(s) 2622;

and

one or more printing device(s) 2624.

In such more enhanced versions, the display 2618, keypad 2620, memory device 2622 and printer 2624 may be connected to bus 2610, or they might be connected to CPU 2616 through an I/O port/controller portion (not shown) of the CPU. Display 2618 may

be used to display information from SPU 500, CPU 2616 and/or host 2608. Keypad 2620 may be used to input information to SPU 500, CPU 2616 and/or host 2608. Printer 2624 may be used to print information from any/all of these sources.

Removable/replaceable memory 2622 may comprise a memory cartridge or memory medium such as a bulk storage device, for providing additional long-term or short-term storage. Memory 2622 may be easily removable from housing 2602 if desired.

In one example embodiment, portable appliance 2600 may have the form factor of a "smart card" (although a "smart card" form factor may provide certain advantages, housing 2602 may have the same or different form factor as "conventional" smart cards). Alternatively, such a portable electronic appliance 2600 may, for example, be packaged in a PCMCIA card configuration (or the like) which is currently becoming quite popular on personal computers and is predicted to become common for desk-top computing devices and Personal Digital Assistants. One advantageous form factor for the portable electronic appliance housing 2602 may be, for example, a Type 1, 2, or 3 PCMCIA card (or other derivations) having credit card or somewhat larger dimensions. Such a form factor is conveniently portable, and may be insertable into a wide array of computers and consumer appliances, as well as receptacles at commercial establishments such as retail establishments and banks, and at public

communications points, such as telephone or other telecommunication "booths."

Housing 2602 may be insertable into and removable from a port, slot or other receptacle provided by host 2608 so as to be physically (or otherwise operatively) connected to a computer or other electronic appliance. The portable appliance connector 2604 may be configured to allow easy removability so that appliance 2600 may be moved to another computer or other electronic appliance at a different location for a physical connection or other operative connection with that other device.

Portable electronic appliance 2600 may provide a valuable and relatively simple means for a user to move permissions and methods between their (compatible) various electronic appliances 600, such as between a notebook computer, a desktop computer and an office computer. It could also be used, for example, to allow a consumer to visit a next door neighbor and allow that neighbor to watch a movie that the consumer had acquired a license to view, or perhaps to listen to an audio record on a large capacity optical disk that the consumer had licensed for unlimited plays.

Portable electronic appliance 2600 may also serve as a "smart card" for financial and other transactions for users to

employ in a variety of other applications such as, for example, commercial applications. The portable electronic appliance 2600 may, for example, carry permission and/or method information used to authorize (and possibly record) commercial processes and services.

An advantage of using the preferred embodiment VDE portable appliance 2600 for financial transactions such as those typically performed by banks and credit card companies is that VDE allows financial clearinghouses (such as VISA, MasterCard, or American Express) to experience significant reductions in operating costs. The clearinghouse reduction in costs result from the fact that the local metering and budget management that occurs at the user site through the use of a VDE electronic appliance 600 such as portable appliance 2600 frees the clearinghouse from being involved in every transaction. In contrast to current requirements, clearinghouses will be able to perform their functions by periodically updating their records (such as once a month). Audit and/or budget "roll-ups" may occur during a connection initiated to communicate such audit and/or budget information and/or through a connection that can occur at periodic or relatively periodic intervals and/or during a credit updating, purchasing, or other portable appliance 2600 transaction.

Clearinghouse VDE digital distribution transactions would require only occasional authorization and/or audit or other administrative "roll-ups" to the central service, rather than far more costly connections during each session. Since there would be no requirement for the maintenance of a credit card purchase "paper trail" (the authorization and then forwarding of the credit card slip), there could be substantial cost reductions for clearinghouses (and, potentially, lower costs to users) due to reduction in communication costs, facilities to handle concurrent processing of information, and paper handling aspects of transaction processing costs. This use of a portable appliance 2600 would allow credit enforcement to exploit distributed processing employing the computing capability in each VDE electronic appliance 600. These credit cost and processing advantages may also apply to the use of non-smart card and non-portable VDE electronic appliance 600s.

Since VDE 100 may be configured as a highly secure commercial environment, and since the authentication processes supported by VDE employ digital signature processes which provide a legal validation that should be equivalent to paper documentation and handwritten signatures, the need for portable appliance 2600 to maintain paper trails, even for more costly transactions, is eliminated. Since auditable billing and control mechanisms are built into VDE 100 and automated, they may

replace traditional electronic interfaces to VISA, Master Card, AMEX, and bank debit accounts for digitally distributed other products and services, and may save substantial operating costs for such clearinghouses.

Portable appliance 2600 may, if desired, maintain for a consumer a portable electronic history. The portable history can be, for example, moved to an electronic "dock" or other receptacle, in or operatively connected to, a computer or other consumer host appliance 2608. Host appliance 2608 could be, for example, an electronic organizer that has control logic at least in part in the form of a microcomputer and that stores information in an organized manner, e.g., according to tax and/or other transaction categories (such as type of use or activity). By use of this arrangement, the consumer no longer has to maintain receipts or otherwise manually track transactions but nevertheless can maintain an electronic, highly secure audit trail of transactions and transaction descriptions. The transaction descriptions may, for example, securely include the user's digital signature, and optionally, the service or goods provider's digital signature.

When a portable appliance 2600 is "docked" to a host 2608 such as a personal computer or other electronic appliance (such as an electronic organizer), the portable appliance 2600 could communicate interim audit information to the host. In one

embodiment, this information could be read, directly or indirectly, into a computer or electronic organizer money and/or tax management program (for example, Quicken or Microsoft Money and/or Turbo Tax and/or Andrew Tobias' Managing Your Money). This automation of receipt management would be an enormous boon to consumers, since the management and maintenance of receipts is difficult and time-consuming, receipts are often lost or forgotten, and the detail from credit card billings is often wholly inadequate for billing and reimbursement purposes since credit card billings normally don't provide sufficient data on the purchased items or significant transaction parameters.

In one embodiment, the portable appliance 2600 could support secure (in this instance encrypted and/or authenticated) two-way communications with a retail terminal which may contain a VDE electronic appliance 600 or communicate with a retailer's or third party provider's VDE electronic appliance 600. During such a secure two-way communication between, for example, each participant's secure VDE subsystem, portable appliance 2600 VDE secure subsystem may provide authentication and appropriate credit or debit card information to the retail terminal VDE secure subsystem. During the same or different communication session, the terminal could similarly, securely communicate back to the portable appliance 2600 VDE

secure subsystem details as to the retail transaction (for example, what was purchased and price, the retail establishment's digital signature, the retail terminal's identifier, tax related information, etc.).

For example, a host 2608 receptacle for receiving and/or attaching to portable appliance 2600 could be incorporated into or operatively connected to, a retail or other commercial establishment terminal. The host terminal 2608 could be operated by either a commercial establishment employee or by the portable appliance 2600 holder. It could be used to, for example, input specific keyboard and/or voice input specific information such as who was taken to dinner, why something was purchased, or the category that the information should be attached to. Information could then be automatically "parsed" and routed into securely maintained (for example, encrypted) appropriate database management records within portable appliance 2600. Said "parsing" and routing would be securely controlled by VDE secure subsystem processes and could, for example, be based on category information entered in by the user and/or based on class of establishment and/or type (category) of expenditure information (or other use). Categorization can be provided by the retail establishment, for example, by securely communicating electronic category information as a portion, for example, of electronic receipt information or alternatively by

printing a hard copy receipt using printer 2624. This process of categorization may take place in the portable appliance 2600 or, alternatively, it could be performed by the retail establishment and periodically "rolled-up" and communicated to the portable appliance 2600 holder.

Retail, clearinghouse, or other commercial organizations may maintain and use by securely communicating to appliance 2600 one or more of generic classifications of transaction types (for example, as specified by government taxation rules) that can be used to automate the parsing of information into records and/or for database information "roll-ups" for; and/or in portable appliance 2600 or one or more associated VDE nodes. In such instances, host 2608 may comprise an auxiliary terminal, for example, or it could comprise or be incorporated directly within a commercial establishments cash registers or other retail transactions devices. The auxiliary terminal could be menu and/or icon driven, and allow very easy user selection of categorization. It could also provide templates, based on transaction type, that could guide the user through specifying useful or required transaction specific information (for example, purpose for a business dinner and/or who attended the dinner). For example, a user might select a business icon, then select from travel, sales, meals, administration, or purchasing icons for example, and then enter in very specific information

and/or a key word, or other code that might cause the downloading of a transaction's detail into the portable appliance 2600. This information might also be stored by the commercial establishment, and might also be communicated to the appropriate government and/or business organizations for validation of the reported transactions (the high level of security of auditing and communications and authentication and validation of VDE should be sufficiently trusted so as not to require the maintenance of a parallel audit history, but parallel maintenance may be supported, and maintained at least for a limited period of time so as to provide backup information in the event of loss or "failure" of portable appliance 2600 and/or one or more appliance 2600 associated VDE installations employed by appliance 2600 for historical and/or status information record maintenance). For example, of a retail terminal maintained necessary transaction information concerning a transaction involving appliance 2600, it could communicate such information to a clearinghouse for archiving (and/or other action) or it could periodically, for example, at the end of a business day, securely communicate such information, for example, in the form of a VDE content container object, to a clearinghouse or clearinghouse agent. Such transaction history (and any required VDE related status information such as available credit) can be maintained and if necessary, employed to reconstruct the information in a portable appliance 2600 so as to allow a replacement appliance to

be provided to an appliance 2600 user or properly reset internal information in data wherein such replacement and/or resetting provides all necessary transaction and status information.

In a retail establishment, the auxiliary terminal host 2608 might take the form of a portable device presented to the user, for example at the end of a meal. The user might place his portable appliance 2600 into a smart card receptacle such as a PCMCIA slot, and then enter whatever additional information that might appropriately describe the transaction as well as satisfying whatever electronic appliance 600 identification procedure(s) required. The transaction, given the availability of sufficient credit, would be approved, and transaction related information would then be communicated back from the auxiliary terminal directly into the portable appliance 2600. This would be a highly convenient mode of credit usage and record management.

The portable device auxiliary terminal might be "on-line," that is electronically communicating back to a commercial establishment and/or third party information collection point through the use of cellular, satellite, radio frequency, or other communications means. The auxiliary terminal might, after a check by a commercial party in response to receipt of certain identification information at the collection point, communicate back to the auxiliary terminal whether or not to accept the

portable appliance 2600 based on other information, such as a bad credit record or a stolen portable appliance 2600. Such a portable auxiliary terminal would also be very useful at other commercial establishments, for example at gasoline stations, rental car return areas, street and stadium vendors, bars, and other commercial establishments where efficiency would be optimized by allowing clerks and other personnel to consummate transactions at points other than traditional cash register locations.

As mentioned above, portable appliance 2600 may communicate from time to time with other electronic appliances 600 such as, for example, a VDE administrator. Communication during a portable appliance 2600 usage session may result from internally stored parameters dictating that the connection should take place during that current session (or next or other session) of use of the portable appliance. The portable appliance 600 can carry information concerning a real-time date or window of time or duration of time that will, when appropriate, require the communication to take place (e.g., perhaps before the transaction or other process which has been contemplated by the user for that session or during it or immediately following it). Such a communication can be accomplished quickly, and could be a secure, VDE two-way communication during which information is communicated to a central information handler. Certain other

information may be communicated to the portable appliance 2600 and/or the computer or other electronic appliance to which the portable appliance 2600 has been connected. Such communicated other information can enable or prevent a contemplated process from proceeding, and/or make the portable appliance 2600, at least in part, unusable or useable.

Information communicated to the portable appliance 2600 could include one or more modifications to permissions and methods, such as a resetting or increasing of one or more budgets, adding or withdrawing certain permissions, etc.

The permissions and/or methods (i.e., budgets) carried by the portable appliance 2600 may have been assigned to it in conjunction with an "encumbering" of another, stationary or other portable VDE electronic appliance 600. In one example, a portable appliance 2600 holder or other VDE electronic appliance 600 and/or VDE electronic appliance 600 user could act as "guarantor" of the financial aspects of a transaction performed by another party. The portable appliance 2600 of the holder would record an "encumbrance," which may be, during a secure communication with a clearinghouse, be recorded and maintained by the clearinghouse and/or some other financial services party until all or a portion of debt responsibilities of the other party were paid or otherwise satisfied. Alternatively or in addition, the encumbrance may also be maintained within the

portable appliance 2600, representing the contingent obligation of the guarantor. The encumbrance may be, by some formula, included in a determination of the credit available to the guarantor. The credit transfer, acceptance, and/or record management, and related processes, may be securely maintained by the security features provided by aspects of the present invention. Portable appliance 600 may be the sole location for said permissions and/or methods for one or more VDE objects 300, or it may carry budgets for said objects that are independent of budgets for said objects that are found on another, non-portable VDE electronic appliance 600. This may allow budgets, for example, to be portable, without requiring "encumbering" and budget reconciliation.

Portable VDE electronic appliance 2600 may carry (as may other VDE electronic appliance 600s described) information describing credit history details, summary of authorizations, and usage history information (e.g., audit of some degree of transaction history or related summary information such as the use of a certain type/class of information) that allows re-use of certain VDE protected information at no cost or at a reduced cost. Such usage or cost of usage may be contingent, at least in part, on previous use of one or more objects or class of objects or amount of use, etc., of VDE protected information.

Portable appliance 2600 may also carry certain information which may be used, at least in part, for identification purposes. This information may be employed in a certain order (e.g. a pattern such as, for example, based on a pseudo-random algorithm) to verify the identity of the carrier of the portable appliance 2600. Such information may include, for example, one's own or a wife's and/or other relatives maiden names, social security number or numbers of one's own and/or others, birth dates, birth hospital(s), and other identifying information. It may also or alternatively provide or include one or more passwords or other information used to identify or otherwise verify/authenticate an individual's identity, such as voice print and retinal scan information. For example, a portable appliance 2600 can be used as a smart card that carries various permissions and/or method information for authorizations and budgets. This information can be stored securely within portable appliance 2600 in a secure database 610 arrangement. When a user attempts to purchase or license an electronic product or otherwise use the "smart card" to authorize a process, portable appliance 2600 may query the user for identification information or may initiate an identification process employing scanned or otherwise entered information (such as user fingerprint, retinal or voice analysis or other techniques that may, for example, employ mapping and/or matching of provided characteristics to information securely stored within the portable appliance 2600).

The portable appliance 2600 may employ different queries at different times (and/or may present a plurality of queries or requests for scanning or otherwise entering identifying information) so as to prevent an individual who has come into possession of appropriate information for one or more of the "tests" of identity from being able to successfully employ the portable appliance 2600.

A portable appliance 600 could also have the ability to transfer electronic currency or credit to another portable appliance 2600 or to another individual's account, for example, using secure VDE communication of relevant content between secure VDE subsystems. Such transfer may be accomplished, for example, by telecommunication to, or presentation at, a bank which can transfer credit and/or currency to the other account. The transfer could also occur by using two cards at the same portable appliance 2600 docking station. For example, a credit transaction workstation could include dual PCMCIA slots and appropriate credit and/or currency transfer application software which allows securely debiting one portable appliance 2600 and "crediting" another portable appliance (i.e., debiting from one appliance can occur upon issuing a corresponding credit and/or currency to the other appliance). One portable appliance 600, for example, could provide an authenticated credit to another user. Employing two "smart card" portable appliance 600 would enable

the user of the providing of "credit" "smart card" to go through a transaction process in which said user provides proper identification (for example, a password) and identifies a "public key" identifying another "smart card" portable appliance 2600. The other portable appliance 2600 could use acceptance processes, and provide proper identification for a digital signature (and the credit and/or currency sender may also digitally sign a transaction certificate so the sending act may not be repudiated and this certificate may accompany the credit and/or currency as VDE container content. The transactions may involve, for example, user interface interaction that stipulates interest and/or other terms of the transfer. It may employ templates for common transaction types where the provider of the credit is queried as to certain parameters describing the agreement between the parties. The receiving portable appliance 2600 may iteratively or as a whole be queried as to the acceptance of the terms. VDE negotiation techniques described elsewhere in this application may be employed in a smart card transfer of electronic credit and/or currency to another VDE smart card or other VDE installation.

Such VDE electronic appliance 600/portable appliance 2600 credit transfer features would significantly reduce the overhead cost of managing certain electronic credit and/or currency activities by significantly automating these processes

through extending the computerization of credit control and credit availability that was begun with credit cards and extended with debit cards. The automation of credit extension and/or currency transfer and the associated distributed processing advantages described, including the absence of any requirement for centralized processing and telecommunications during each transaction, truly make credit and/or currency, for many consumers and other electronic currency and/or credit users, an efficient, trusted, and portable commodity.

The portable appliance 2600 or other VDE electronic appliance 600, can, in one embodiment, also automate many tax collection functions. A VDE electronic appliance 600 may, with great security, record financial transactions, identify the nature of the transaction, and identify the required sales or related government transaction taxes, debit the taxes from the users available credit, and securely communicate this information to one or more government agencies directly at some interval (for example monthly), and/or securely transfer this information to, for example, a financial clearinghouse, which would then transfer one or more secure, encrypted (or unsecure, calculated by clearinghouse, or otherwise computed) information audit packets (e.g., VDE content containers and employing secure VDE communication techniques) to the one or more appropriate, participating government agencies. The overall integrity and

security of VDE 100 could ensure, in a coherent and centralized manner, that electronic reporting of tax related information (derived from one or more electronic commerce activities) would be valid and comprehensive. It could also act as a validating source of information on the transfer of sales tax collection (e.g., if, for example, said funds are transferred directly to the government by a commercial operation and/or transferred in a manner such that reported tax related information cannot be tampered with by other parties in a VDE pathway of tax information handling). A government agency could select transactions randomly, or some subset or all of the reported transactions for a given commercial operation can be selected. This could be used to ensure that the commercial operation is actually paying to the government all appropriate collected funds required for taxes, and can also ensure that end-users are charged appropriate taxes for their transactions (including receipt of interest from bank accounts, investments, gifts, etc.

Portable appliance 2600 financial and tax processes could involve template mechanisms described elsewhere herein. While such an electronic credit and/or currency management capability would be particularly interesting if managed at least in part, through the use of a portable appliance 2600, credit and/or currency transfer and similar features would also be applicable

for non-portable VDE electronic appliance 600's connected to or installed within a computer or other electronic device.

User Notification Exception Interface ("Pop Up") 686

As described above, the User Modification Exception Interface 686 may be a set of user interface programs for handling common VDE functions. These applications may be forms of VDE templates and are designed based upon certain assumptions regarding important options, specifically, appropriate to a certain VDE user model and important messages that must be reported given certain events. A primary function of the "pop-up" user interface 686 is to provide a simple, consistent user interface to, for example, report metering events and exceptions (e.g., any condition for which automatic processing is either impossible or arguably undesirable) to the user, to enable the user to configure certain aspects of the operation of her electronic appliance 600 and, when appropriate, to allow the user to interactively control whether to proceed with certain transaction processes. If an object contains an exception handling method, that method will control how the "pop-up" user interface 686 handles specific classes of exceptions.

The "pop-user" interface 686 normally enables handling of tasks not dedicated to specific objects 300, such as for example:

- Logging onto an electronic appliance 600 and/or entering into a VDE related activity or class of activities,
- Configuring an electronic appliance 600 for a registered user, and/or generally for the installation, with regard to user preferences, and automatic handling of certain types of exceptions,
- Where appropriate, user selecting of meters for use with specific properties, and
- Providing an interface for communications with other electronic appliances 600, including requesting and/or for purchasing or leasing content from distributors, requesting clearinghouse credit and/or budgets from a clearinghouse, sending and/or receiving information to and/or from other electronic appliances, and so on.

Figure 72A shows an example of a common "logon" VDE electronic appliance 600 function that may use user interface 686. "Log-on" can be done by entering a user name, account name, and/or password. As shown in the provided example, a configuration option provided by the "pop-up" user interface 686 dialog can be "Login at Setup", which, if selected, will initiate a VDE Login procedure automatically every time the user's

electronic appliance 600 is turned on or reset. Similarly, the "pop-up" user interface 686 could provide an interface option called "Login at Type" which, if selected, will initiate a procedure automatically every time, for example, a certain type of object or specific content type application is opened such as a file in a certain directory, a computer application or file with a certain identifying extension, or the like.

Figure 72B shows an example of a "pop-up" user interface 686 dialog that is activated when an action by the user has been "trapped," in this case to warn the user about the amount of expense that will be incurred by the user's action, as well as to alert the user about the object 300 which has been requested and what that particular object will cost to use. In this example, the interface dialog provides a button allowing the user to request further detailed information about the object, including full text descriptions, a list of associated files, and perhaps a history of past usage of the object including any residual rights to use the object or associated discounts.

The "Cancel" button 2660 in Figure 72B cancels the user's trapped request. "Cancel" is the default in this example for this dialog and can be activated, for example, by the return and enter keys on the user's keyboard 612, by a "mouse click" on that button, by voice command, or other command mechanisms. The

"Approve button" 2662, which must be explicitly selected by a mouse click or other command procedure, allows the user to approve the expense and proceed. The "More options" control 2664 expands the dialog to another level of detail which provides further options, an example of which is shown in Figure 72C.

Figure 72C shows a secondary dialog that is presented to the user by the "pop-up" user interface 686 when the "More options" button 2664 in Figure 72B is selected by the user. As shown, this dialog includes numerous buttons for obtaining further information and performing various tasks.

In this particular example, the user is permitted to set "limits" such as, for example, the session dollar limit amount (field 2666), a total transaction dollar limit amount (field 2668), a time limit (in minutes) (field 2670), and a "unit limit" (in number of units such as paragraphs, pages, etc.) (field 2672). Once the user has made her selections, she may "click on" the OKAY button (2674) to confirm the limit selections and cause them to take effect.

Thus, pop-up user interface dialogues can be provided to specify user preferences, such as setting limits on budgets and/or other aspects of object content usage during any one session or over a certain duration of time or until a certain point in time.

Dialogs can also be provided for selecting object related usage options such as selecting meters and budgets to be used with one or more objects. Selection of options may be applied to types (that is classes) of objects by associating the instruction with one or more identifying parameters related to the desired one or more types. User specified configuration information can set default values to be used in various situations, and can be used to limit the number or type of occasions on which the user's use of an object is interrupted by a "pop-up" interface 686 dialog. For example, the user might specify that a user request for VDE protected content should be automatically processed without interruption (resulting from an exceptions action) if the requested processing of information will not cost more than \$25.00 and if the total charge for the entire current session (and/or day and/or week, etc.) is not greater than \$200.00 and if the total outstanding and unpaid charge for use hasn't exceeded \$2500.00.

Pop-up user interface dialogs may also be used to notify the user about significant conditions and events. For example, interface 686 may be used to:

- remind the user to send audit information to a clearinghouse,

- inform a user that a budget value is low and needs replenishing,
- remind the user to back up secure database 610, and
- inform the user about expirations of PERCs or other dates/times events.

Other important "pop-up" user interface 686 functions include dialogs which enable flexible browsing through libraries of properties or objects available for licensing or purchase, either from locally stored VDE protected objects and/or from one or more various, remotely located content providers. Such function may be provided either while the user's computer is connected to a remote distributor's or clearinghouse's electronic appliance 600, or by activating an electronic connection to a remote source after a choice (such as a property, a resource location, or a class of objects or resources is selected). A browsing interface can allow this electronic connection to be made automatically upon a user selection of an item, or the connection itself can be explicitly activated by the user. See Figure 72D for an example of such a "browsing" dialog.

Smart Objects

VDE 100 extends its control capabilities and features to "intelligent agents." Generally, an "intelligent agent" can act as

an emissary to allow a process that dispatches it to achieve a result the originating process specifies. Intelligent agents that are capable of acting in the absence of their dispatch process are particularly useful to allow the dispatching process to access, through its agent, the resources of a remote electronic appliance. In such a scenario, the dispatch process may create an agent (e.g., a computer program and/or control information associated with a computer program) specifying a particular desired task(s), and dispatch the agent to the remote system. Upon reaching the remote system, the "agent" may perform its assigned task(s) using the remote system's resources. This allows the dispatch process to, in effect, extend its capabilities to remote systems where it is not present.

Using an "agent" in this manner increases flexibility. The dispatching process can specify, through its agent, a particular desired task(s) that may not exist or be available on the remote system. Using such an agent also provides added trustedness; the dispatch process may only need to "trust" its agent, not the entire remote system. Agents have additional advantages.

Software agents require a high level of control and accountability to be effective, safe and useful. Agents in the form of computer viruses have had devastating effects worldwide. Therefore, a system that allows an agent to access it should be

able to control it or otherwise prevent the agent from damaging important resources. In addition, systems allowing themselves to be accessed by an agent should sufficiently trust the agent and/or provide mechanisms capable of holding the true dispatcher of the agent responsible for the agent's activities. Similarly, the dispatching process should be able to adequately limit and/or control the authority of the agents it dispatches or else it might become responsible for unforeseen activities by the agent (e.g., the agent might run up a huge bill in the course of following imprecise instructions it was given by the process that dispatched it).

These significant problems in using software agents have not been adequately addressed in the past. The open, flexible control structures provided by VDE 100 addresses these problems by providing the desired control and accountability for software agents (e.g., agent objects). For example, VDE 100 positively controls content access and usage, provides guarantee of payment for content used, and enforces budget limits for accessed content. These control capabilities are well suited to controlling the activities of a dispatched agent by both the process that dispatches the agent and the resource accessed by the dispatched agent.

One aspect of the preferred embodiment provided by the present invention provides a "smart object" containing an agent. Generally, a "smart object" may be a VDE object 300 that contains some type(s) of software programs ("agents") for use with VDE control information at a VDE electronic appliance 600. A basic "smart object" may comprise a VDE object 300 that, for example, contains (physically and/or virtually):

a software agent, and

at least one rule and/or control associated with the software agent that governs the agent's operation.

Although this basic structure is sufficient to define a "smart object," Figure 73 shows a combination of containers and control information that provides one example of a particularly advantageous smart object structure for securely managing and controlling the operation of software agents.

As shown in Figure 73, a smart object 3000 may be constructed of a container 300, within which is embedded one or more further containers (300z, 300y, etc.). Container 300 may further contain rules and control information for accessing and using these embedded containers 300z, 300y, etc. Container 300z embedded in container 300 is what makes the object 3000 a "smart object." It contains an "agent" that is managed and controlled by VDE 100.

The rules and control information 806f associated with container 300z govern the circumstances under which the agent may be released and executed at a remote VDE site, including any limitations on execution based on the cost of execution for example. This rule and control information may be specified entirely in container 300z, and/or may be delivered as part of container 300, as part of another container (either within container 300 or a separately deliverable container), and/or may be already present at the remote VDE site.

The second container 300y is optional, and contains content that describes the locations at which the agent stored in container 300z may be executed. Container 300y may also contain rules and control information 806e that describe the manner in which the contents of container 300y may be used or altered. This rule and control information 806e and/or further rules 300y(1) also contained within container 300y may describe searching and routing mechanisms that may be used to direct the smart object 3000 to a desired remote information resource. Container 300y may contain and/or reference rules and control information 300y(1) that specify the manner in which searching and routing information use and any changes may be paid for.

Container 300x is an optional content container that is initially "empty" when the smart object 3000 is dispatched to a

remote site. It contains rules and control information 300x(1) for storing the content that is retrieved by the execution of the agent contained in container 300z. Container 300x may also contain limits on the value of content that is stored in the retrieval container so as to limit the amount of content that is retrieved.

Other containers in the container 300 may include administrative objects that contain audit and billing trails that describe the actions of the agent in container 300z and any charges incurred for executing an agent at a remote VDE node. The exact structure of smart object 3000 is dependent upon the type of agent that is being controlled, the resources it will need for execution, and the types of information being retrieved.

The smart object 3000 in the example shown in Figure 73 may be used to control and manage the operation of an agent in VDE 100. The following detailed explanation of an example smart object transaction shown in Figure 74 may provide a helpful, but non-limiting illustration. In this particular example, assume a user is going to create a smart object 3000 that performs a library search using the "Very Fast and Efficient" software agent to search for books written about some subject of interest (e.g., "fire flies"). The search engine is designed to return a list of books to the user. The search engine in this example may spend no more than \$10.00 to find the appropriate books,

may spend no more than \$3.00 in library access or communications charges to get to the library, and may retrieve no more than \$15.00 in information. All information relating to the search or use is to be returned to the user and the user will permit no information pertaining to the user or the agent to be released to a third party.

In this example, a dispatching VDE electronic appliance 3010 constructs a smart object 3000 like the one shown in Figure 73. The rule set in 806a is specified as a control set that contains the following elements:

1. a smart_agent_execution event that specifies the smart agent is stored in embedded container 300z and has rules controlling its execution specified in that container;
2. a smart_agent_use event that specifies the smart agent will operate using information and parameters stored in container 300;
3. a routing_use event that specifies the information routing information is stored in container 300y and has rules controlling this information stored in that container;

4. an information_write event that specifies
information written will be stored in container 300y,
300x, or 300w depending on its type (routing,
retrieved, or administrative), and that these
containers have independent rules that control how
information is written into them.

The rule set in control set 806b contains rules that specify the rights desired by this smart object 3000. Specifically, this control set specifies that the software agent desires:

1. A right to use the "agent execution" service on the remote VDE site. Specific billing and charge information for this right is carried in container 300z.
2. A right to use the "software description list" service on the remote VDE site. Specific billing and charge information for this for this right is carried in container 300y.
3. A right to use an "information locator service" on a remote VDE site.

4. A right to have information returned to the user without charge (charges to be incurred on release of information and payment will be by a VISA budget)
5. A right to have all audit information returned such that it is readable only by the sender.

The rule set in control set 806c specifies that container 300w specifies the handling of all events related to its use. The rule set in control set 806d specifies that container 300x specifies the handling of all events related to its use. The rule set in control set 806e specifies that container 300y specifies the handling of all events related to its use. The rule set in control set 806f specifies that container 300z specifies the handling of all events related to its use.

Container 300z is specified as containing the "Very Fast and Efficient" agent content, which is associated with the following rules set:

1. A use event that specifies a meter and VISA budget that limits the execution to \$10.00 charged against the owner's VISA card. Audits of usage are required and will be stored in object 300w under control information specified in that object.

After container 300z and its set are specified, they are constructed and embedded in the smart object container 300.

Container 300y is specified as a content object with two types of content. Content type A is routing information and is read/write in nature. Content type A is associated with a rules set that specifies:

1. A use event that specifies no operation for the release of the content. This has the effect of not charging for the use of the content.
2. A write event that specifies a meter and a VISA budget that limits the value of writing to \$3.00. The billing method used by the write is left unspecified and will be specified by the control method that uses this rule.
3. Audits of usage are required and will be stored in object 300w under control information specified in that object.

Content type B is information that is used by the software agent to specify parameters for the agent. This content is

specified as the string "fire fly" or "fire flies". Content type B is associated with the following rule set:

1. A use event that specifies that the use may only be by the software agent or a routing agent. The software agent has read only permission, the routing agent has read/write access to the information. There are no charges associated with using the information, but two meters; one by read and one by write are kept to track use of the information by various steps in the process.
2. Audits of usage are required and will be stored in object 300w under control information specified in that object.

After container 300y and its control sets are specified, they are constructed and embedded in the smart object container 300.

Container 300x is specified as a content object that is empty of content. It contains a control set that contains the following rules:

1. A write_without_billing event that specifies a meter and a general budget that limits the value of writing to \$15.00.
2. Audits of usage are required and will be stored in object 300w under control information specified in that object.
3. An empty use control set that may be filled in by the owner of the information using predefined methods (method options).

After container 300x and its control sets are specified, they are constructed and embedded in the smart object container 300.

Container 300w is specified as an empty administrative object with a control set that contains the following rules:

1. A use event that specifies that the information contained in the administrative object may only be released to the creator of smart object container 300.
2. No other rules may be attached to the administrative content in container 300w.

After container 300w and its control sets are specified, they are constructed and embedded in the smart object container 300.

At this point, the smart object has been constructed and is ready to be dispatched to a remote VDE site. The smart object is sent to a remote VDE site (e.g., using electronic mail or another transport mechanism) that contains an information locator service 3012 via path 3014. The smart object is registered at the remote site 3012 for the "item locator service." The control set in container related to "item locator service" is selected and the rules contained within it activated at the remote site 3012. The remote site 3012 then reads the contents of container 300y under the control of rule set 806f and 300y(1), and permits writes of a list of location information into container 300y pursuant to these rules. The item locator service writes a list of three items into the smart object, and then "deregisters" the smart object (now containing the location information) and sends it to a site 3016 specified in the list written to the smart object via path 3018. In this example, the user may have specified electronic mail for transport and a list of remote sites that may have the desired information is stored as a forwarding list.

The smart object 3000, upon arriving at the second remote site 3016, is registered with that second site. The site 3016 provides agent execution and software description list services

compatible with VDE as a service to smart objects. It publishes these services and specifies that it requires \$10.00 to start the agent and \$20/piece for all information returned. The registration process compares the published service information against the rules stored within the object and determines that an acceptable overlap does not exist. Audit information for all these activities is written to the administrative object 300w. The registration process then fails (the object is not registered), and the smart object is forwarded by site 3016 to the next VDE site 3020 in the list via path 3022.

The smart object 3000, upon arriving at the third remote site 3020, is registered with that site. The site 3020 provides agent execution and software description list services compatible with VDE as a service to smart objects. It publishes these services and specifies that it requires \$1.00 to start the agent and \$0.50/piece for all information returned. The registration process compares the published service information against the rules stored within the object and determines that an acceptable overlap exists. The registration process creates a URT that specifies the agreed upon control information. This URT is used in conjunction with the other control information to execute the software agent under VDE control.

The agent software starts and reads its parameters out of container 300y. It then starts searching the database and obtains 253 "hits" in the database. The list of hits is written to container 300x along with a completed control set that specifies the granularity of each item and that each item costs \$0.50. Upon completion of the search, the budget for use of the service is incremented by \$1.00 to reflect the use charge for the service. Audit information for all these activities is written to the administrative object 300w.

The remote site 3020 returns the now "full" smart object 3000 back to the original sender (the user) at their VDE node 3010 via path 3024. Upon arrival, the smart object 3000 is registered and the database records are available. The control information specified in container 300x is now a mix of the original control information and the control information specified by the service regarding remote release of their information. The user then extracts 20 records from the smart object 3000 and has \$10.00 charged to her VISA budget at the time of extraction.

In the above smart agent VDE examples, a certain organization of smart object 3000 and its constituent containers is described. Other organizations of VDE and smart object related control information and parameter data may be created

and may be used for the same purposes as those ascribed to object 3000 in the above example.

Negotiation and Electronic Contracts

An electronic contract is an electronic form of an agreement including rights, restrictions, and obligations of the parties to the agreement. In many cases, electronic agreements may surround the use of digitally provided content; for example, a license to view a digitally distributed movie. It is not required, however, that an electronic agreement be conditioned on the presence or use of electronic content by one or more parties to the agreement. In its simplest form, an electronic agreement contains a right and a control that governs how that right is used.

Electronic agreements, like traditional agreements, may be negotiated between their parties (terms and conditions submitted by one or more parties may simply be accepted (cohesion contract) by one or more other parties and/or such other parties may have the right to select certain of such terms and conditions (while others may be required)). Negotiation is defined in the dictionary as "the act of bringing together by mutual agreement." The preferred embodiment provides electronic negotiation processes by which one or more rights and associated controls can be established through electronic automated negotiation of terms.

Negotiations normally require a precise specification of rights and controls associated with those rights. PERC and URT structures provide a mechanism that may be used to provide precise electronic representations of rights and the controls associated with those rights. VDE thus provides a "vocabulary" and mechanism by which users and creators may specify their desires. Automated processes may interpret these desires and negotiate to reach a common middle ground based on these desires. The results of said negotiation may be concisely described in a structure that may be used to control and enforce the results of the electronic agreement. VDE further enables this process by providing a secure execution space in which the negotiation process(es) are assured of integrity and confidentiality in their operation. The negotiation process(es) may also be executed in such a manner that inhibits external tampering with the negotiation.

A final desirable feature of agreements in general (and electronic representations of agreements in particular) is that they be accurately recorded in a non-repudiable form. In traditional terms, this involves creating a paper document (a contract) that describes the rights, restrictions, and obligations of all parties involved. This document is read and then signed by all parties as being an accurate representation of the agreement. Electronic agreements, by their nature, may not be initially

rendered in paper. VDE enables such agreements to be accurately electronically described and then electronically signed to prevent repudiation. In addition, the preferred embodiment provides a mechanism by which human-readable descriptions of terms of the electronic contract can be provided.

VDE provides a concise mechanism for specifying control sets that are VDE site interpretable. Machine interpretable mechanisms are often not human readable. VDE often operates the negotiation process on behalf of at least one human user. It is thus desirable that the negotiation be expressible in "human readable form." VDE data structures for objects, methods, and load modules all have provisions to specify one or more DTDs within their structures. These DTDs may be stored as part of the item or they may be stored independently. The DTD describes one or more data elements (MDE, UDE, or other related data elements) that may contain a natural language description of the function of that item. These natural language descriptions provide a language independent, human readable description for each item. Collections of items (for example, a BUDGET method) can be associated with natural language text that describes its function and forms a term of an electronically specified and enforceable contract. Collections of terms (a control set) define a contract associated with a specific right. VDE thus permits the

electronic specification, negotiation, and enforcement of electronic contracts that humans can understand and adhere to.

VDE 100 enables the negotiation and enforcement of electronic contracts in several ways:

- it enables a concise specification of rights and control information that permit a common vocabulary and procedure for negotiation,
- it provides a secure processing environment within which to negotiate,
- it provides a distributed environment within which rights and control specifications may be securely distributed,
- it provides a secure processing environment in which negotiated contracts may be electronically rendered and signed by the processes that negotiate them, and
- it provides a mechanism that securely enforces a negotiated electronic contract.

Types of Negotiations

A simple form of a negotiation is a demand by one party to form an "adhesion" contract. There are few, if any, options that may be chosen by the other party in the negotiation. The recipient of the demand has a simple option; she may accept or reject the terms and conditions (control information) in the demand. If she accepts the conditions, she is granted rights subject to the specified control information. If she rejects the conditions, she is not granted the rights. PERC and URT structures may support negotiation by demand; a PERC or control set from a PERC may be presented as a demand, and the recipient may accept or reject the demand (selecting any permitted method options if they are presented).

A common example of this type of negotiation today is the purchase of software under the terms of a "shrink-wrap license." Many widely publicized electronic distribution schemes use this type of negotiation. CompuServe is an example of an on-line service that operates in the same manner. The choice is simple: either pay the specified charge or don't use the service or software. VDE supports this type of negotiation with its capability to provide PERCs and URTs that describe rights and control information, and by permitting a content owner to provide a REGISTER method that allows a user to select from a set of predefined method options. In this scenario, the REGISTER

method may contain a component that is a simplified negotiation process.

A more complex form of a negotiation is analogous to "haggling." In this scenario, most of the terms and conditions are fixed, but one or more terms (e.g., price or payment terms) are not. For these terms, there are options, limits, and elements that may be negotiated over. A VDE electronic negotiation between two parties may be used to resolve the desired, permitted, and optional terms. The result of the electronic negotiation may be a finalized set of rules and control information that specify a completed electronic contract. A simple example is the scenario for purchasing software described above adding the ability of the purchaser to select a method of payment (VISA, Mastercard, or American Express). A more complex example is a scenario for purchasing information in which the price paid depends on the amount of information about the user that is returned along with a usage audit trail. In this second example, the right to use the content may be associated with two control sets. One control set may describe a fixed ("higher") price for using the content. Another control set may describe a fixed ("lower") price for using the content with additional control information and field specifications requiring collection and return the user's personal information. In both of these cases, the optional and permitted fields and control sets in a PERC may describe the options that

may be selected as part of the negotiation. To perform the negotiation, one party may propose a control set containing specific fields, control information, and limits as specified by a PERC; the other party may pick and accept from the control sets proposed, reject them, or propose alternate control sets that might be used. The negotiation process may use the permitted, required, and optional designations in the PERC to determine an acceptable range of parameters for the final rule set. Once an agreement is reached, the negotiation process may create a new PERC and/or URT that describes the result of the negotiation. The resulting PERCs and/or URTs may be "signed" (e.g., using digital signatures) by all of the negotiation processes involved in the negotiation to prevent repudiation of the agreement at a later date.

Additional examples of negotiated elements are: electronic cash, purchase orders, purchase certificates (gift certificates, coupons), bidding and specifications, budget "rollbacks" and reconciliation, currency exchange rates, stock purchasing, and billing rates.

A set of PERCs that might be used to support the second example described above is presented in Figures 75A (PERC sent by the content owner), 75B (PERC created by user to represent their selections and rights), and 75C (PERC for controlling the

negotiation process). These PERCs might be used in conjunction with any of the negotiation process(es) and protocols described later in this section.

Figure 75A shows an example of a PERC 3100 that might be created by a content provider to describe their rights options. In this example, the PERC contains information regarding a single USE right. Two alternate control sets 3102a, 3102b are presented for this right in the example. Control set 3102a permits the use of the content without passing back information about the user, and another control set 3102b permits the use of the content and collects "response card" type information from the user. Both control sets 3102a, 3102b may use a common set of methods for most of the control information. This common control information is represented by a CSR 3104 and CS0 3106.

Control set 3102a in this PERC 3100 describes a mechanism by which the user may obtain the content without providing any information about its user to the content provider. This control set 3102a specifies a well-known vending control method and set of required methods and method options. Specifically, in this example, control set 3102a defines a BUDGET method 3108 (e.g., one of VISA, Mastercard, or American Express) and it defines a BILLING method 3110 that specifies a charge (e.g., a one-time charge of \$100.00).

Control set 3102b in this PERC 3100 describes another mechanism by which the user may obtain the content. In this example, the control set 3102b specifies a different vending control method and a set of required methods and method options. This second control set 3102b specifies a BUDGET method 3112 (e.g., one of VISA, Mastercard, or American Express), a BILLING method 3116 that specifies a charge (e.g., a lesser one-time charge such as \$25.00) and an AUDIT method 3114 that specifies a set of desired and required fields. The required and desired field specification 3116 may take the form of a DTD specification, in which, for example, the field names are listed.

The content creator may "prefer" one of the two control sets (e.g., control set 2) over the other one. If so, the "preferred" control set may be "offered" first in the negotiation process, and withdrawn in favor of the "non-preferred" control set if the other party to the negotiation "rejects" the "preferred" control set.

In this example, these two control sets 3102a, 3102b may share a common BUDGET method specification. The BUDGET method specification may be included in the CSR 3104 or CS0 3106 control sets if desired. Selecting control set 3102a (use with no information passback) causes a unique component assembly to be assembled as specified by the PERC 3100. Specifically, in this

example it selects the "Vending" CONTROL method 3118, the BILLING method 3110 for a \$100 fixed charge, and the rest of the control information specified by CSR 3104 and CS0 3106. It also requires the user to specify her choice of acceptable BUDGET method (e.g., from the list including VISA, Mastercard, and American Express). Selecting control set 3102b assembles a different component assembly using the "Vending with 'response card'" CONTROL method 3120, the BILLING method 3116 (e.g., for a \$25 fixed charge), an AUDIT method 3114 that requires the fields listed in the Required Fields DTD 3116. The process may also select as many of the fields listed in the Desired Fields DTD 3116 as are made available to it. The rest of the control information is specified by CSR 3104 and CS0 3106. The selection of control set 3102b also forces the user to specify their choice of acceptable BUDGET methods (e.g., from the list including VISA, Mastercard, and American Express).

Figure 75B shows an example of a control set 3125 that might be used by a user to specify her desires and requirements in a negotiation process. This control set has a USE rights section 3127 that contains an aggregated CSR budget specification 3129 and two optional control sets 3131a, 3131b for use of the content. Control set 3131a requires the use of a specific CONTROL method 3133 and AUDIT method 3135. The specified AUDIT method 3135 is parameterized with a list of

fields 3137 that may be released in the audit trail. Control set 3131a also specifies a BILLING method 3139 that can cost no more than a certain amount (e.g., \$30.00). Control set 3131b in this example describes a specific CONTROL method 3141 and may reference a BILLING method 3143 that can cost no more than a certain amount (e.g., \$150.00) if this option is selected.

Figure 75E shows a more high-level view of an electronic contract 3200 formed as a "result" of a negotiation process as described above. Electronic contract 3200 may include multiple clauses 3202 and multiple digital signatures 3204. Each clause 3202 may comprise a PERC/URT such as item 3160 described above and shown in Figure 75D. Each "clause" 3202 of electronic contract 3200 thus corresponds to a component assembly 690 that may be assembled and executed by a VDE electronic appliance 600. Just as in normal contracts, there may be as many contract clauses 3202 within electronic contract 3200 as is necessary to embody the "agreement" between the "parties." Each of clauses 3202 may have been electronically negotiated and may thus embody a part of the "agreement" (e.g., a "compromise") between the parties. Electronic contract 3200 is "self-executing" in the sense that it may be literally executed by a machine, i.e., a VDE electronic appliance 600 that assembles component assemblies 690 as specified by various electronic clauses 3202. Electronic contract 3200 may be automatically

"enforced" using the same VDE mechanisms discussed above that are used in conjunction with any component assembly 690. For example, assuming that a clause 3202(2) corresponds to a payment or BILLING condition or term, its corresponding component assembly 690 when assembled by a user's VDE electronic appliance 600 may automatically determine whether conditions are right for payment and, when they are, automatically access an appropriate payment mechanism (e.g., a virtual "credit card" object for the user) to arrange that payment to be made. As another example, assuming that electronic contract clause N 3202(N) corresponds to a user's obligation to provide auditing information to a particular VDE participant, electronic contract 3200 will cause VDE electronic appliance 600 to assemble a corresponding component assembly 690 that may, for example, access the appropriate audit trails within secure database 610 and provide them in an administrative object to the correct participant. Figure 75F shows that clause 3202(N) may, for example, specify a component assembly 690 that arranges for multiple steps in a transaction 3206 to occur. Some of these steps (e.g., step 3208(4), 3208(5)) may be conditional on a test (e.g., 3208(3)) such as, for example, whether content usage has exceeded a certain amount, whether a certain time period has expired, whether a certain calendar date has been reached, etc.

Digital signatures 3204 shown in the Figure 75E electronic contract 3200 may comprise, for example, conventional digital signatures using public key techniques as described above. Some electronic contracts 3200 may not bear any digital signatures 3204. However, it may be desirable to require the electronic appliance 600 of the user who is a party to the electronic contract 3200 to digitally "sign" the electronic contract so that the user cannot later repudiate the contract, for evidentiary purposes, etc. Multiple parties to the same contract may each digitally "sign" the same electronic contract 3200 similarly to the way multiple parties to a contract memorialized in a written instrument use an ink pen to sign the instrument.

Although each of the clauses 3202 of electronic contract 3200 may ultimately correspond to a collection of data and code that may be executed by a PPE 650, there may in some instances be a need for rendering a human readable version of the electronic contract. This need can be accommodated by, as mentioned above, providing text within one or more DTDs associated with the component assembly or assemblies 690 used to "self-execute" the contract. Such text might, for example, describe from a functional point of view what the corresponding electronic contract clause 3202 means or involves, and/or might describe in legally enforceable terms what the legal obligation under the contract is or represents. "Templates" (described

elsewhere herein) might be used to supply such text from a text library. An expert system and/or artificial intelligence capability might be used to impose syntax rules that bind different textual elements together into a coherent, humanly readable contract document. Such text could, if necessary, be reviewed and modified by a "human" attorney in order customize it for the particular agreement between the parties and/or to add further legal obligations augmenting the "self-executing" electronic obligations embodied within and enforced by the associated component assemblies 690 executing on a VDE electronic appliance 600. Such text could be displayed automatically or on demand upon execution of the electronic contract, or it could be used to generate a printed humanly-readable version of the contract at any time. Such a document version of the electronic contract 3200 would not need to be signed in ink by the parties to the agreement (unless desired) in view of the fact that the digital signatures 3204 would provide a sufficiently secure and trusted evidentiary basis for proving the parties' mutual assent to all the terms and conditions within the contract.

In the preferred embodiment, the negotiation process executes within a PPE 650 under the direction of a further PERC that specifies the process. Figure 75C shows an example of a PERC 3150 that specifies a negotiation process. The PERC 3150 contains a single right 3152 for negotiation, with two permitted control sets 3154a, 3154b described for that right. The first

control set 3154a may be used for a "trusted negotiation"; it references the desired negotiation CONTROL method ("Negotiate") 3156 and references (in fields 3157a, 3157b) two UDEs that this CONTROL method will use. These UDEs may be, for example, the PERCs 3100, 3125 shown in Figures 75A and 75B. The second control set 3154b may be used by "multiple negotiation" processes to manage the negotiation, and may provide two negotiation methods: "Negotiate1," and "Negotiate2". Both negotiation processes may be described as required methods ("Negotiate1" and "Negotiate2") 3156, 3158 that take respective PERCs 3100, 3125 as their inputs. The CONTROL method 3158 for this control set in this example may specify the name of a service that the two negotiation processes will use to communicate with each other, and may also manage the creation of the URT resulting from the negotiation.

When executed, the negotiation process(es) specified by the PERC 3150 shown in Figure 75C may be provided with the PERCs 3100, 3125 as input that will be used as the basis for negotiation. In this example, the choice of negotiation process type (trusted or multiple) may be made by the executing VDE node. The PERC 3150 shown in Figure 75C might be, for example, created by a REGISTER method in response to a register request from a user. The process specified by this PERC

3150 may then be used by a REGISTER method to initiate negotiation of the terms of an electronic contract.

During this example negotiation process, the PERCs 3100, 3125 shown in Figures 75A and 75B act as input data structures that are compared by a component assembly created based on PERC 3150 shown in Figure 35C. The component assembly specified by the control sets may be assembled and compared, starting with required "terms," and progressing to preferred/desired "terms" and then moving on to permitted "terms," as the negotiation continues. Method option selections are made using the desired method and method options specified in the PERCs 3100, 3125. In this example, a control set for the PERC 3100 shown in Figure 75A may be compared against the PERC 3125 shown in Figure 75B. If there is a "match," the negotiation is successfully concluded and "results" are generated.

In this embodiment, the results of such negotiation will generally be written as a URT and "signed" by the negotiation process(es) to indicate that an agreement has been reached. These electronic signatures provide the means to show that a (virtual) "meeting of minds" was reached (one of the traditional legal preconditions for a contract to exist). An example of the URT 3160 that would have been created by the above example is shown in Figure 75D.

This URT 3160 (which may itself be a PERC 808) includes a control set 3162 that reflects the "terms" that were "agreed upon" in the negotiation. In this example, the "agreed upon" terms must "match" terms required by input PERCs 3100, 3125 in the sense that they must be "as favorable as" the terms required by those PERCs. The negotiation result shown includes, for example, a "negotiated" control set 3162 that in some sense corresponds to the control set 3102a of the Figure 75A PERC 3100 and to the control set 3131a of the Figure 75B control set 3125. Resulting "negotiated" control set 3162 thus includes a required BUDGET method 3164 that corresponds to the control set 3125 desired BUDGET method 3142 but which is "within" the range of control sets allowed by control set 3100 required BUDGET method 3112. Similarly, resulting negotiated control set 3162 includes a required AUDIT method 3166 that complies with the requirements of both PERC 3100 required AUDIT method 3114 and PERC 3125 required AUDIT method 3135. Similarly, resulting negotiated control set 3162 includes a required BILLING method 3170 that "matches" or complies with each of PERC 3100 required BILLING method 3116 and PERC 3125 required BILLING method 3170.

Another class of negotiation is one under which no rules are fixed and only the desired goals are specified. The negotiation processes for this type of negotiation may be very

complex. It may utilize artificial intelligence, fuzzy logic, and/or related algorithms to reach their goals. VDE supports these types of processes by providing a mechanism for concisely specifying rights, control information, fields and goals (in the form of desired rights, control information, and fields). Goals for these types of processes might be specified as one or more control sets that contain specific elements that are tagged as optional, permitted, or desired.

Types of Negotiations

Negotiations in the preferred embodiment may be structured in any of the following ways:

1. shared knowledge
2. trusted negotiator
3. "zero-based" knowledge

"Shared knowledge" negotiations are based on all parties knowing all of the rules and constraints associated with the negotiation. Demand negotiations are a simple case of shared knowledge negotiations; the demander presents a list of demands that must be accepted or rejected together. The list of demands comprises a complete set of knowledge required to accept or reject each item on the list. VDE enables this class of negotiation to occur electronically by providing a mechanism by which demands may be encoded, securely passed, and securely processed between

and with secure VDE subsystems using VDE secure processing, and communication capabilities. Other types of shared knowledge negotiations employed by VDE involve the exchange of information between two or more negotiating parties; the negotiation process(es) can independently determine desired final outcome(s) based on their independent priorities. The processes can then negotiate over any differences. Shared knowledge negotiations may require a single negotiation process (as in a demand type negotiation) or may involve two or more cooperative processes. Figures 76A and 76B illustrate scenarios in which one and two negotiation processes are used in a shared knowledge negotiation.

Figure 76A shows a single negotiation process 3172 that takes any number of PERCs 808 (e.g., supplied by different parties) as inputs to the negotiation. The negotiation process 3172 executes at a VDE node under supervision of "Negotiation Process Rules and Control information" that may be supplied by a further PERC (e.g., PERC 3150 shown in Figure 75C). The process 3172 generates one or more PERCs/URTs 3160 as results of the negotiation.

Figure 76B shows multiple negotiation processes 3172A-3172N each of which takes as input a PERC 808 from a party and a further PERC 3150 that controls the negotiation process,

and each of which generates a negotiated "result" PERC/URT 3160 as output. Processes 3172A-3172N may execute at the same or different VDE nodes and may communicate using a "negotiation protocol."

Single and multiple negotiation processes may be used for specific VDE sites. The negotiation processes are named, and can be accessed using well known method names. PERCs and URTs may be transported in administrative or smart objects to remote VDE sites for processing at that site, as may the control PERCs and REGISTER method that controls the negotiation.

Multiple negotiation processes require the ability to communicate between these processes 3172; including secure communication between secure processes that are present at physically separate VDE sites (secure subsystems). VDE generalizes the inter-process communication into a securely provided service that can be used if the configuration requires it. The inter-process communication uses a negotiation protocol to exchange information about rule sets between processes 3172. An example of a negotiation protocol includes the following negotiation "primitives":

WANT	Want a set of terms and conditions
ACCEPT	Accept a set of terms and conditions
REJECT	Reject a set of terms and conditions

OFFER	Offer a set of terms and conditions in exchange for other terms and conditions
HAVE	Assert a set of terms and conditions are possible or desirable
QUIT	Assert the end of the negotiation without reaching an agreement
AGREEMENT	Conclude the negotiation and pass the rule set for signature

The WANT primitive takes rights and control set (or parts of control sets) information, and asserts to the other process(es) 3172 that the specified terms are desired or required. Demand negotiations are a simple case of a WANT primitive being used to assert the demand. This example of a protocol may introduce a refined form of the WANT primitive, REQUIRE. In this example, REQUIRE allows a party to set terms that she decides are necessary for a contract to be formed, WANT may allow the party to set terms that are desirable but not essential. This permits a distinction between "must have" and "would like to have."

In this example, WANT primitives must always be answered by an ACCEPT, REJECT, or OFFER primitive. The ACCEPT primitive permits a negotiation process 3172 to accept a set of terms and conditions. The REJECT primitive permits a process 3172 to reject an offered set of terms and conditions.

Rejecting a set of required terms and conditions may terminate the negotiation. OFFER permits a counter-offer to be made.

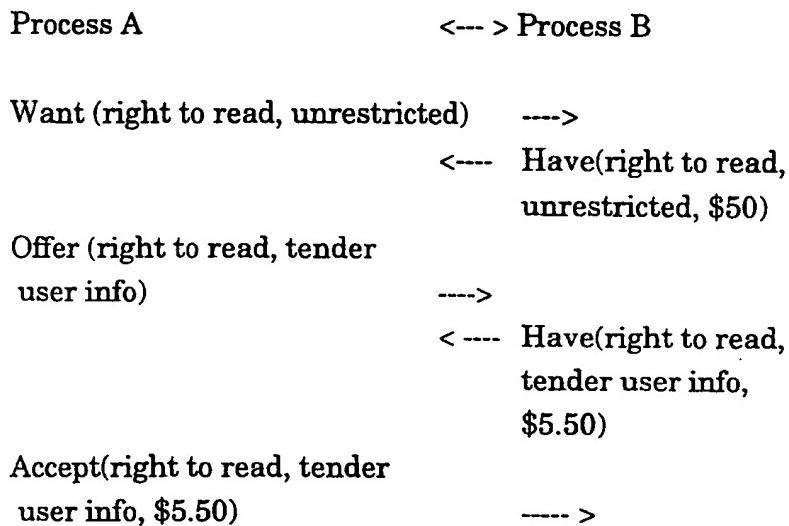
The HAVE, QUIT, and AGREEMENT primitives permit the negotiation protocols to pass information about rule sets. Shared knowledge negotiations may, for example, start with all negotiation processes 3172A-3172N asserting HAVE (my PERC) to the other processes. HAVE is also used when an impasse is reached and one process 3172 needs to let the other process 3172 know about permitted options. QUIT signals an unsuccessful end of the negotiation without reaching an agreement, while AGREEMENT signals a successful end of an agreement and passes the resulting "negotiated" PERC/URT 3160 to the other process(es) 3172 for signature.

In "trusted negotiator" negotiations, all parties provide their demands and preferences to a "trusted" negotiator and agree to be bound by her decision. This is similar to binding arbitration in today's society. VDE enables this mode of negotiation by providing an environment in which a "trusted" negotiation service may be created. VDE provides not only the mechanism by which demands, desires, and limits may be concisely specified (e.g., in PERCs), but in which the PERCs may be securely transferred to a "trusted" negotiation service along with a rule set that specifies how the negotiation will be

conducted, and by providing a secure execution environment so that the negotiation process may not be tampered with. Trusted negotiator services can be used at VDE sites where the integrity of the site is well known. Remote trusted negotiation services can be used by VDE sites that do not possess sufficient computing resources to execute one or more negotiation process(es); they can establish a communication link to a VDE site that provides this service and permits the service to handle the negotiation on their behalf.

"Zero-based" knowledge negotiations share some characteristics of the zero-based knowledge protocols used for authentication. It is well understood in the art how to construct a protocol that can determine if a remote site is the holder of a specific item without exchanging or exposing the item. This type of protocol can be constructed between two negotiation processes operating on at least one VDE site using a control set as their knowledge base. The negotiation processes may exchange information about their control sets, and may make demands and counter proposals regarding using their individual rule sets. For example, negotiation process A may communicate with negotiation process B to negotiate rights to read a book. Negotiation process A specifies that it will pay not more than \$10.00 for rights to read the book, and prefers to pay between \$5.00 and \$6.00 for this right. Process A's rule set also specifies

that for the \$5.00 option, it will permit the release of the reader's name and address. Process B's rule set specifies that it wants \$50.00 for rights to read the book, and will provide the book for \$5.50 if the user agrees to release information about himself. The negotiation might go something like this:



In the above example, process A first specifies that it desires the right to read the book without restrictions or other information release. This starting position is specified as a rights option in the PERC that process A is using as a rule. Process B checks its rules and determines that an unrestricted right to read is indeed permitted for a price of \$50. It replies to process A that these terms are available. Process A receives this reply and checks it against the control set in the PERC it uses as a rule base. The \$50 is outside the \$10 limit specified for this control set, so Process A cannot accept the offer. It makes a counter offer

(as described in another optional rights option) of an unrestricted right to read coupled with the release of the reader's name and address. The name and address fields are described in a DTD referenced by Process A's PERC. Process B checks its rules PERC and determines that an unrestricted right to read combined with the release of personal information is a permitted option. It compares the fields that would be released as described in the DTD provided by Process A against the desired fields in a DTD in its own PERC, and determines an acceptable match has occurred. It then sends an offer for unrestricted rights with the release of specific information for the cost of \$5.50 to Process A. Process A compares the right, restrictions, and fields against its rule set and determines that \$5.50 is within the range of \$5-\$6 described as acceptable in its rule set. It accepts the offer as made. The offer is sealed by both parties "signing" a new PERC that describes the results of the final negotiation (unrestricted rights, with release of user information, for \$5.50). The new PERC may be used by the owner of Process A to read the content (the book) subject to the described terms and conditions.

Further Chain of Handling Model

As described in connection with Figure 2, there are four (4) "participant" instances of VDE 100 in one example of a VDE chain of handling and control used, for example, for content distribution. The first of these participant instances, the content

creator 102, is manipulated by the publisher, author, rights owner or distributor of a literary property to prepare the information for distribution to the consumer. The second participant instance, VDE rights distributor 106, may distribute rights and may also administer and analyze customers' use of VDE authored information. The third participant instance, content user 112, is operated by users (included end-users and distributors) when they use information. The fourth participant instance, financial clearinghouse 116 enables the VDE related clearinghouse activities. A further participant, a VDE administrator, may provide support to keep VDE 100 operating properly. With appropriate authorizations and Rights Operating System components installed, any VDE electronic appliance 600 can play any or all of these participant roles.

Literary property is one example of raw material for VDE 100. To transfer this raw material into finished goods, the publisher, author, or rights owner uses tools to transform digital information (such as electronic books, databases, computer software and movies) into protected digital packages called "objects." Only those consumers (or others along the chain of possession such as a redistributor) who receive permission from a distributor 106 can open these packages. VDE packaged content can be constrained by "rules and control information" provided by content creator 102 and/or content distributor 106—or by other

VDE participants in the content's distribution pathway, i.e., normally by participants "closer" to the creation of the VDE secured package than the participant being constrained.

Once the content is packaged in an "object," the digital distribution process may begin. Since the information packages themselves are protected, they may be freely distributed on CD-ROM disks, through computer networks, or broadcast through cable or by airwaves. Informal "out of channel" exchange of protected packages among end-users does not pose a risk to the content property rights. This is because only authorized individuals may use such packages. In fact, such "out of channel" distribution may be encouraged by some content providers as a marginal cost method of market penetration. Consumers with usage authorizations (e.g., a VISA clearinghouse budget allowing a certain dollar amount of usage) may, for example, be free to license classes of out of channel VDE protected packages provided to them, for example, by a neighbor.

To open a VDE package and make use of its content, an end-user must have permission. Distributors 106 can grant these permissions, and can very flexibly (if permitted by senior control information) limit or otherwise specify the ways in which package contents may be used. Distributors 106 and financial clearinghouses 116 also typically have financial responsibilities

(they may be the same organization in some circumstances if desired). They ensure that any payments required from end-users fulfill their own and any other participant's requirements. This is achieved by auditing usage.

Distributors 106 using VDE 100 may include software publishers, database publishers, cable, television, and radio broadcasters, and other distributors of information in electronic form. VDE 100 supports all forms of electronic distribution, including distribution by broadcast or telecommunications, or by the physical transfer of electronic storage media. It also supports the delivery of content in homogeneous form, seamlessly integrating information from multiple distribution types with separate delivery of permissions, control mechanisms and content.

Distributors 106 and financial clearinghouses 116 may themselves be audited based on secure records of their administrative activities and a chain of reliable, "trusted" processes ensures the integrity of the overall digital distribution process. This allows content owners, for example, to verify that they are receiving appropriate compensation based on actual content usage or other agreed-upon bases.

Since the end-user 112 is the ultimate consumer of content in this example, VDE 100 is designed to provide protected

content in a seamless and transparent way—so long as the end-user stays within the limits of the permissions she has received. The activities of end-user 112 can be metered so that an audit can be conducted by distributors 106. The auditing process may be filtered and/or generalized to satisfy user privacy concerns. For example, metered, recorded VDE content and/or appliance usage information may be filtered prior to reporting it to distributor 106 to prevent more information than necessary from being revealed about content user 112 and/or her usage.

VDE 100 gives content providers the ability to recreate important aspects of their traditional distribution strategies in electronic form and to innovatively structure new distribution mechanisms appropriate to their individual needs and circumstances. VDE 100 supports relevant participants in the chain of distribution, and also enables their desired pricing strategies, access and redistribution permissions, usage rules, and related administrative and analysis procedures. The reusable functional primitives of VDE 100 can be flexibly combined by content providers to reflect their respective distribution objectives. As a result, content providers can feed their information into established distribution channels and also create their own personalized distribution channels.

A summary of the roles of the various participants of virtual distribution environment 100 is set forth in the table below:

Role	Description
"Traditional" Participants	
Content creator	Packager and initial distributor of digital information
Content owner	Owner of the digital information.
Distributors	Provide rights distribution services for budgets and/or content.
Auditor	Provides services for processing and reducing usage based audit trails.
Clearinghouse	Provides intermediate store and forward services for content and audit information. Also, typically provides a platform for other services, including third party financial providers and auditors.
Network provider	Provides communication services between sites and other participants.
Financial providers	Provider of third party sources of electronic funds to end-users and distributors. Examples of this class of users are VISA, American Express, or a government.
End Users	Consumers of information.
Other Participants	
Redistributor	Redistributes rights to use content based on chain of handling restrictions from content providers and/or other distributors.
VDE Administrator	Provider of trusted services for support of VDE nodes.

Role	Description
Independent Audit Processor	Provider of services for processing and summarizing audit trail data. Provides anonymity to end-users while maintaining the comprehensive audit capabilities required by the content providers.
Agents	Provides distributed presence for end-users and other VDE participants.

Of these various VDE participants, the "redistributor," "VDE Administrator," "independent audit processor" and "agents" are, in certain respects "new" participants that may have no counterpart in many "traditional" business models. The other VDE participants (i.e., content provider, content owner, distributors, auditor, clearinghouse, network provider and financial providers) have "traditional" business model counterparts in the sense that traditional distribution models often included non-electronic participants performing some of the same business roles they serve in the virtual distribution environment 100.

VDE distributors 106 may also include "end-users" who provide electronic information to other end-users. For example, Figure 77 shows a further example of a virtual distribution environment 100 chain of handling and control provided by the present invention. As compared to Figure 2, Figure 77 includes a new "client administrator" participant 700. In addition, Figure

77 shows several different content users 112(1), 112(2), . . . , 112(n) that may all be subject to the "jurisdiction" of the client administrator 700. Client administrator 700 may be, for example, a further rights distributor within a corporation or other organization that distributes rights to employees or other organization participant units (such as divisions, departments, networks, and or groups, etc.) subject to organization-specific "rules and control information." The client administrator 700 may fashion rules and control information for distribution, subject to "rules and control" specified by creator 102 and/or distributor 106.

As mentioned above, VDE administrator 116b is a trusted VDE node that supports VDE 100 and keeps it operating properly. In this example, VDE administrator 116b may provide, among others, any of all of the following:

- VDE appliance initialization services
- VDE appliance reinitialization/update services
- Key management services
- "Hot lists" of "rogue" VDE sites
- Certification authority services
- Public key registration
- Client participant unit content budgets and other authorizations

All participants of VDE 100 have the innate ability to participate in any role. For example, users may gather together existing protected packages, add (create new content) packages of their own, and create new products. They may choose to serve as their own distributor, or delegate this responsibility to others. These capabilities are particularly important in the object oriented paradigm which is entering the marketplace today. The production of compound objects, object linking and embedding, and other multi-source processes will create a need for these capabilities of VDE 100. The distribution process provided by VDE 100 is symmetrical; any end-user may redistribute information received to other end-users, provided they possess permission from and follow the rules established by the distribution chain VDE control information governing redistribution. End-users also may, within the same rules and permissions restriction, encapsulate content owned by others within newly published works and distribute these works independently. Royalty payments for the new works may be accessed by the publisher, distributors, or end-users, and may be tracked and electronically collected at any stage of the chain.

Independent financial providers can play an important role in VDE 100. The VDE financial provider role is similar to the role played by organizations such as VISA in traditional distribution scenarios. In any distribution model, authorizing

payments for use of products or services and auditing usage for consistency and irregularities, is critical. In VDE 100, these are the roles filled by independent financial providers. The independent financial providers may also provide audit services to content providers. Thus, budgets or limits on use, and audits, or records of use, may be processed by (and may also be put in place by) clearinghouses 116, and the clearinghouses may then collect usage payments from users 112. Any VDE user 112 may assign the right to process information or perform services on their behalf to the extend allowed by senior control information. The arrangement by which one VDE participant acts on behalf of another is called a "proxy." Audit, distribution, and other important rights may be "proxied" if permitted by the content provider. One special type of "proxy" is the VDE administrator 116b. A VDE administrator is an organization (which may be acting also as a financial clearinghouse 116) that has permission to manage (for example, "intervene" to reset) some portion or all of VDE secure subsystem control information for VDE electronic appliances. This administration right may extend only to admitting new appliances to a VDE infrastructure and to recovering "crashed" or otherwise inoperable appliances, and providing periodic VDE updates.

More On Object Creation, Distribution Methods, Budgets, and Audits

VDE node electronic appliances 600 in the preferred embodiment can have the ability to perform object creation, distribution, audit collection and usage control functions provided by the present invention. Incorporating this range of capabilities within each of many electronic appliances 600 provided by the preferred embodiment is important to a general goal of creating a single (or prominent) standard for electronic transactions metering, control, and billing, that, in its sum of installations, constitutes a secure, trusted, virtual transaction/distribution management environment. If, generally speaking, certain key functions were generally or frequently missing, at least in general purpose VDE node electronic appliances 600, then a variety of different products and different standards would come forth to satisfy the wide range of applications for electronic transaction/distribution management; a single consistent set of tools and a single "rational," trusted security and commercial distribution environment will not have been put in place to answer the pressing needs of the evolving "electronic highway." Certain forms of certain electronic appliances 600 containing VDE nodes which incorporate embedded dedicated VDE microcontrollers such as certain forms of video cassette players, cable television converters and the like may not necessarily have or need full VDE capabilities. However, the preferred

embodiment provides a number of distributed, disparately located electronic appliances 600 each of which desirably include authoring, distribution, extraction, audit, and audit reduction capabilities, along with object authoring capabilities.

The VDE object authoring capabilities provided by the preferred embodiment provides an author, for example, with a variety of menus for incorporating methods in a VDE object 300, including:

- menus for metering and/or billing methods which define how usage of the content portion of a VDE object is to be controlled,
- menus related to extraction methods for limiting and/or enabling users of a VDE object from extracting information from that object, and may include placing such information in a newly created and/or pre-existing VDE content container,,
- menus for specifying audit methods—that is, whether or not certain audit information is to be generated and communicated in some secure fashion back to an object provider, object creator, administrator, and/or clearinghouse, and

- menus for distribution methods for controlling how an object is distributed, including for example, controlling distribution rights of different participant's "down" a VDE chain of content container handling.

The authoring capabilities may also include procedures for distributing administrative budgets, object distribution control keys, and audit control keys to distributors and other VDE participants who are authorized to perform distribution and/or auditing functions on behalf of the author, distributors, and/or themselves. The authoring capabilities may also include procedures for selecting and distributing distribution methods, audit methods and audit reduction methods, including for example, securely writing and/or otherwise controlling budgets for object redistribution by distributors to subsequent VDE chain of content handling participants.

The content of an object 300 created by an author may be generated with the assistance of a VDE aware application program or a non-VDE aware application program. The content of the object created by an author in conjunction with such programs may include text, formatted text, pictures, moving pictures, sounds, computer software, multimedia, electronic games, electronic training materials, various types of files, and so on, without limitation. The authoring process may encapsulate

content generated by the author in an object, encrypt the content with one or more keys, and append one or more methods to define parameters of allowed use and/or required auditing of use and/or payment for use of the object by users (and/or by authorized users only). The authoring process may also include some or all aspects of distributing the object.

In general, in the preferred embodiment, an author can:

- A. Specify what content is to be included in an object.
- B. Specify content oriented methods including:
Information--typically abstract, promotional, identifying, scheduling, and/or other information related to the content and/or author
Content--e.g. list of files and/or other information resources containing content, time variables, etc.
- C. Specify control information (typically a collection of methods related to one another by one or more permissions records, including any method defining variables) and any initial authorized user list including, for example:
Control information over Access & Extraction

Control information over Distribution

Control information over Audit Processing

A VDE node electronic appliance 600 may, for example, distribute an object on behalf of an object provider if a VDE node receives from an object provider administrative budget information for distributing the object and associated distribution key information.

A VDE node electronic appliance 600 may receive and process audit records on behalf of an object provider if that VDE node receives any necessary administrative budget, audit method, and audit key information (used, for example, to decrypt audit trails), from the object provider. An auditing-capable VDE electronic appliance 600 may control execution of audit reduction methods. "Audit reduction" in the preferred embodiment is the process of extracting information from audit records and/or processes that an object provider (e.g., any object provider along a chain of handling of the object) has specified to be reported to an object's distributors, object creators, client administrators, and/or any other user of audit information. This may include, for example, advertisers who may be required to pay for a user's usage of object content. In one embodiment, for example, a clearinghouse can have the ability to "append" budget, audit method, and/or audit key information to an object or class or other grouping of objects located at a user site or located at an

object provider site to ensure that desired audit processes will take place in a "trusted" fashion. A participant in a chain of handling of a VDE content container and/or content container control information object may act as a "proxy" for another party in a chain of handling of usage auditing information related to usage of object content (for example a clearinghouse, an advertiser, or a party interested in market survey and/or specific customer usage information). This may be done by specifying, for that other party, budget, audit method, and/or key information that may be necessary to ensure audit information is gathered and/or provided to, in a proper manner, said additional party. For example, employing specification information provided by said other party.

Object Creation and Initial Control Structures

The VDE preferred embodiment object creation and control structure design processes support fundamental configurability of control information. This enables VDE 100 to support a full range of possible content types, distribution pathways, usage control information, auditing requirements, and users and user groups. VDE object creation in the preferred embodiment employs VDE templates whose atomic elements represent at least in part modular control processes. Employing VDE creation software (in the preferred embodiment a GUI programming process) and VDE templates, users may create VDE objects 300

by, for example, partitioning the objects, placing "meta data" (e.g., author's name, creation date, etc.) into them, and assigning rights associated with them and/or object content to, for example, a publisher and/or content creator. When an object creator runs through this process, she normally will go through a content specification procedure which will request required data. The content specification process, when satisfied, may proceed by, for example, inserting data into a template and encapsulating the content. In addition, in the preferred embodiment, an object may also automatically register its presence with the local VDE node electronic appliance 600 secure subsystem, and at least one permissions record 808 may be produced as a result of the interaction of template instructions and atomic methods, as well as one or more pieces of control structure which can include one or more methods, budgets, and/or etc. A registration process may require a budget to be created for the object. If an object creation process specifies an initial distribution, an administrative object may also be created for distribution. The administrative object may contain one or more permission records 808, other control structures, methods, and/or load modules.

Permissions records 808 may specify various control relationships between objects and users. For example, VDE 100 supports both single access (e.g., one-to-one relationship between a user and a right user) and group access (any number of people

may be authorized as a group). A single permissions record 808 can define both single and group access. VDE 100 may provide "sharing," a process that allows multiple users to share a single control budget as a budget. Additional control structure concepts include distribution, redistribution, and audit, the latter supporting meter and budget information reduction and/or transfer. All of these processes are normally securely controlled by one or more VDE secure subsystems.

Templates and Classes

VDE templates, classes, and flexible control structures support frameworks for organizations and individuals that create, modify, market, distribute, redistribute, consume, and otherwise use movies, audio recordings and live performances, magazines, telephony based retail sales, catalogs, computer software, information databases, multimedia, commercial communications, advertisements, market surveys, infomercials, games, CAD/CAM services for numerically controlled machines, and the like. As the context surrounding these classes changes or evolves, the templates provided by the preferred embodiment of the present invention can be modified to meet these changes for broad use, or more focused activities.

VDE 100 authoring may provide three inputs into a create process: Templates, user input and object content. Templates

act as a set of control instructions and/or data for object control software which are capable of creating (and/or modifying) VDE objects in a process that interacts with user instructions and provided content to create a VDE object. Templates are usually specifically associated with object creation and/or control structures. Classes represent user groups which can include "natural" groups within an organization, such as department members, specific security clearance levels, etc., or ad hoc lists of individual's and/or VDE nodes.

For example, templates may be represented as text files defining specific structures and/or component assemblies. Templates, with their structures and/or component assemblies may serve as VDE object authoring or object control applications. A creation template may consist of a number of sub-templates, which, at the lowest level, represent an "atomic level" of description of object specification. Templates may present one or more models that describe various aspects of a content object and how the object should be created including employing secure atomic methods that are used to create, alter, and/or destroy permissions records 808 and/or associated budgets, etc.

Templates, classes (including user groups employing an object under group access), and flexible control structures including object "independent" permissions records (permissions

that can be associated with a plurality of objects) and structures that support budgeting and auditing as separate VDE processes, help focus the flexible and configurable capabilities inherent within authoring provided by the present invention in the context of specific industries and/or businesses and/or applications. VDE rationalizes and encompasses distribution scenarios currently employed in a wide array of powerful industries (in part through the use of application or industry specific templates). Therefore, it is important to provide a framework of operation and/or structure to allow existing industries and/or applications and/or businesses to manipulate familiar concepts related to content types, distribution approaches, pricing mechanisms, user interactions with content and/or related administrative activities, budgets, and the like.

The VDE templates, classes, and control structures are inherently flexible and configurable to reflect the breadth of information distribution and secure storage requirements, to allow for efficient adaptation into new industries as they evolve, and to reflect the evolution and/or change of an existing industry and/or business, as well as to support one or more groups of users who may be associated with certain permissions and/or budgets and object types. The flexibility of VDE templates, classes, and basic control structures is enhanced through the use of VDE aggregate and control methods which have a compound,

conditional process impact on object control. Taken together, and employed at times with VDE administrative objects and VDE security arrangements and processes, the present invention truly achieves a content control and auditing architecture that can be configured to most any commercial distribution embodiment. Thus, the present invention fully supports the requirements and biases of content providers without forcing them to fit a predefined application model. It allows them to define the rights, control information, and flow of their content (and the return of audit information) through distribution channels.

Modifying Object Content (Adding, Hiding, Modifying, Removing, and/or Extending)

Adding new content to objects is an important aspect of authoring provided by the present invention. Providers may wish to allow one or more users to add, hide, modify, remove and/or extend content that they provide. In this way, other users may add value to, alter for a new purpose, maintain, and/or otherwise change, existing content. The ability to add content to an empty and/or newly created object is important as well.

When a provider provides content and accompanying control information, she may elect to add control information that enables and/or limits the addition, modification, hiding and/or deletion of said content. This control information may concern:

- the nature and/or location of content that may be added, hidden, modified, and/or deleted;
- portions of content that may be modified, hidden, deleted and/or added to;
- required secure control information over subsequent VDE container content usage in a chain of control and/or locally to added, hidden, and/or modified content;
- requirements that provider-specified notices and/or portions of content accompany added, hidden, deleted and/or modified content and/or the fact that said adding, hiding, modification and/or deletion occurred;
- secure management of limitations and/or requirements concerning content that may be removed, hidden and/or deleted from content, including the amount and/or degree of addition, hiding, modification and/or deletion of content;
- providing notice to a provider or providers that modification, hiding, addition and/or deletion has occurred and/or the nature of said occurrence; and
- other control information concerned with modification, addition, hiding, and/or deleting provider content.

A provider may use this control information to establish an opportunity for other users to add value to and/or maintain existing content in a controlled way. For example, a provider of software development tools may allow other users to add commentary and/or similar and/or complementary tools to their provided objects. A provider of movies may allow commentary and/or promotional materials to be added to their materials. A provider of CAD/CAM specifications to machine tool owners may allow other users to modify objects containing instructions associated with a specification to improve and/or translate said instructions for use with their equipment. A database owner may allow other users to add and/or remove records from a provided database object to allow flexibility and/or maintenance of the database.

Another benefit of introducing control information is the opportunity for a provider to allow other users to alter content for a new purpose. A provider may allow other users to provide content in a new setting.

To attach this control information to content, a provider may be provided with, or if allowed, design and implement, a method or methods for an object that govern addition, hiding, modification and/or deletion of content. Design and implementation of such one or more methods may be performed

using VDE software tools in combination with a PPE 650. The provider may then attach the method(s) to an object and/or provide them separately. A permissions record 808 may include requirements associated with this control information in combination with other control information, or a separate permissions record 808 may be used.

An important aspect of adding or modifying content is the choice of encryption/decryption keys and/or other relevant aspects of securing new or altered content. The provider may specify in their method(s) associated with these processes a technique or techniques to be used for creating and/or selecting the encryption/decryption keys and/or other relevant aspect of securing new and/or altered content. For example, the provider may include a collection of keys, a technique for generating new keys, a reference to a load module that will generate keys, a protocol for securing content, and/or other similar information.

Another important implication is the management of new keys, if any are created and/or used. A provider may require that such keys and reference to which keys were used must be transmitted to the provider, or she may allow the keys and/or securing strategy to remain outside a provider's knowledge and/or control. A provider may also choose an intermediate

course in which some keys must be transmitted and others may remain outside her knowledge and/or control.

An additional aspect related to the management of keys is the management of permissions associated with an object resulting from the addition, hiding, modification and/or deletion of content. A provider may or may not allow a VDE chain of control information user to take some or all of the VDE rules and control information associated with granting permissions to access and/or manipulate VDE managed content and/or rules and control information associated with said resulting object. For example, a provider may allow a first user to control access to new content in an object, thereby requiring any other user of that portion of content to receive permission from the first user. This may or may not, at the provider's discretion, obviate the need for a user to obtain permission from the provider to access the object at all.

Keys associated with addition, modification, hiding and/or deletion may be stored in an independent permissions record or records 808. Said permissions record(s) 808 may be delivered to a provider or providers and potentially merged with an existing permissions record or records, or may remain solely under the control of the new content provider. The creation and content of an initial permissions record 808 and any control information

over the permissions record(s) are controlled by the method(s) associated with activities by a provider. Subsequent modification and/or use of said permission record(s) may involve a provider's method(s), user action, or both. A user's ability to modify and/or use permissions record(s) 808 is dependent on, at least in part, the senior control information associated with the permissions record(s) of a provider.

Distribution Control information

To enable a broad and flexible commercial transaction environment, providers should have the ability to establish firm control information over a distribution process without unduly limiting the possibilities of subsequent parties in a chain of control. The distribution control information provided by the present invention allow flexible positive control. No provider is required to include any particular control, or use any particular strategy, except as required by senior control information.

Rather, the present invention allows a provider to select from generic control components (which may be provided as a subset of components appropriate to a provider's specific market, for example, as included in and/or directly compatible with, a VDE application) to establish a structure appropriate for a given chain of handling/control. A provider may also establish control information on their control information that enable and limit modifications to their control information by other users.

The administrative systems provided by the present invention generate administrative "events." These "events" correspond to activities initiated by either the system or a user that correspond to potentially protected processes within VDE. These processes include activities such as copying a permissions record, copying a budget, reading an audit trail record, copying a method, updating a budget, updating a permissions record, updating a method, backing up management files, restoring management files, and the like. Reading, writing, modifying, updating, processing, and/or deleting information from any portion of any VDE record may be administrative events. An administrative event may represent a process that performs one or more of the aforementioned activities on one or more portions of one or more records.

When a VDE electronic appliance 600 encounters an administrative event, that event is typically processed in conjunction with a VDE PPE 650. As in the case of events generally related to access and/or use of content, in most cases administrative events are specified by content providers (including, for example, content creators, distributors, and/or client administrators) as an aspect of a control specified for an object, group and/or class of objects.

For example, if a user initiates a request to distribute permission to use a certain object from a desktop computer to a notebook computer, one of the administrative events generated may be to create a copy of a permissions record that corresponds to the object. When this administrative event is detected by ROS 602, an EVENT method for this type of event may be present. If an EVENT method is present, there may also be a meter, a billing, and a budget associated with the EVENT method. Metering, billing, and budgeting can allow a provider to enable and limit the copying of a permissions record 808.

For example, during the course of processing a control program, a meter, a billing, and a budget and/or audit records may be generated and/or updated. Said audit records may record information concerning circumstances surrounding an administrative event and processing of said event. For example, an audit record may contain a reference to a user and/or system activity that initiated an event, the success or failure of processing said event, the date and/or time, and/or other relevant information.

Referring to the above example of a user with both a desktop and notebook computer, the provider of a permissions record may require an audit record each time a meter for copying said permissions record is processed. The audit record provides a

flexible and configurable control and/or recording environment option for a provider.

In some circumstances, it may be desirable for a provider to limit which aspects of a control component may be modified, updated, and/or deleted. "Atomic element definitions" may be used to limit the applicability of events (and therefore the remainder of a control process, if one exists) to certain "atomic elements" of a control component. For example, if a permissions record 808 is decomposed into "atomic elements" on the fields described in Figure 26, an event processing chain may be limited, for example, to a certain number of modifications of expiration date/time information by specifying only this field in an atomic element definition. In another example, a permissions record 808 may be decomposed into atomic elements based on control sets. In this example, an event chain may be limited to events that act upon certain control sets.

In some circumstances, it may be desirable for a provider to control how administrative processes are performed. The provider may choose to include in distribution records stored in secure database 610 information for use in conjunction with a component assembly 690 that controls and specifies, for example, how processing for a given event in relation to a given method and/or record should be performed. For example, if a provider

wishes to allow a user to make copies of a permissions record 808, she may want to alter the permissions record internally. For example, in the earlier example of a user with a desktop and a notebook computer, a provider may allow a user to make copies of information necessary to enable the notebook computer based on information present in the desktop computer, but not allow any further copies of said information to be made by the notebook VDE node. In this example, the distribution control structure described earlier would continue to exist on the desktop computer, but the copies of the enabling information passed to the notebook computer would lack the required distribution control structure to perform distribution from the notebook computer. Similarly, a distribution control structure may be provided by a content provider to a content provider who is a distributor in which a control structure would enable a certain number of copies to be made of a VDE content container object along with associated copies of permissions records, but the permissions records would be altered (as per specification of the content provider, for example) so as not to allow end-users who received distributor created copies from making further copies for distribution to other VDE nodes.

Although the preceding example focuses on one particular event (copying) under one possible case, similar processes may be used for reading, writing, modifying, updating, processing,

and/or deleting information from records and/or methods under any control relationship contemplated by the present invention. Other examples include: copying a budget, copying a meter, updating a budget, updating a meter, condensing an audit trail, and the like.

Creating Custom Methods

In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, methods may be created "at will," or aliased to another method. These two modes contribute to the superior configurability, flexibility, and positive control of the VDE distribution process. Generally, creating a method involves specifying the required attributes or parameters for the data portion of the method, and then "typing" the method. The typing process typically involves choosing one or more load modules to process any data portions of a method. In addition to the method itself, the process of method creation may also result in a method option subrecord for inclusion in, or modification of, a permissions record, and a notation in the distribution records. In addition to any "standard" load module(s) required for exercise of the method, additional load modules, and data for use with those load modules, may be specified if allowed. These event processing structures control the distribution of the method.

For example, consider the case of a security budget. One form of a typical budget might limit the user to 10Mb of decrypted data per month. The user wishes to move their rights to use the relevant VDE content container object to their notebook. The budget creator might have limited the notebook to the same amount, half the original amount, a prorated amount based on the number of moves budgeted for an object, etc. A distribute method (or internal event processing structure) associated with the budget allows the creator of the budget to make a determination as to the methodology and parameters involved. Of course, different distribution methods may be required for the case of redistribution, or formal distribution of the method. The aggregate of these choices is stored in a permissions record for the method.

An example of the process steps used for the move of a budget record might look something like this:

- 1) Check the move budget (e.g., to determine the number of moves allowed)
- 2) Copy static fields to new record (e.g., as an encumbrance)
- 3) Decrement the Decr counter in the old record (the original budget)
- 4) Increment the Encumbrance counter in the old record

- 5) Write a distribution record
- 6) Write a Distribution Event Id to the new record
- 7) Increment the move meter
- 8) Decrement the move budget
- 9) Increment the Decr counter in the new record

Creating a Budget

In the preferred embodiment, to create a budget, a user manipulates a Graphical User Interface budget distribution application (e.g., a VDE template application). The user fills out any required fields for type(s) of budget, expiration cycle(s), auditor(s), etc. A budget may be specified in dollars, deutsche marks, yen, and/or in any other monetary or content measurement schema and/or organization. The preferred embodiment output of the application, normally has three basic elements. A notation in the distribution portion of secure database 610 for each budget record created, the actual budget records, and a method option record for inclusion in a permissions record. Under some circumstances, a budget process may not result in the creation of a method option since an existing method option may be being used. Normally, all of this output is protected by storage in secure database 610 and/or in one or more administrative objects.

There are two basic modes of operation for a budget distribution application in the preferred embodiment. In the first case, the operator has an unlimited ability to specify budgets. The budgets resulting from this type of activity may be freely used to control any aspect of a distribution process for which an operator has rights, including for use with "security" budgets such as quantities limiting some aspect of usage. For example, if the operator is a "regular person," he may use these budgets to control his own utilization of objects based on a personal accounting model or schedule. If the operator is an authorized user at VISA, the resulting budgets may have broad implications for an entire distribution system. A core idea is that this mode is controlled strictly by an operator.

The second mode of operation is used to create "alias" budgets. These budgets are coupled to a preexisting budget in an operator's system. When an operator fills a budget, an encumbrance is created on the aliased budget. When these types of budgets are created, the output includes two method option subrecords coupled together: the method option subrecord for the aliased budget, and a method option subrecord for the newly created budget. In most cases, the alias budget can be used in place of the original budget if the budget creator is authorized to modify the method options within the appropriate required method record of a permissions record.

For example, assume that a user (client administrator) at a company has the company's VISA budget on her electronic appliance 600. She wants to distribute budget to a network of company users with a variety of preexisting budgets and requirements. She also wants to limit use of the company's VISA budget to certain objects. To do this, she aliases a company budget to the VISA budget. She then modifies (if so authorized) the permissions record for all objects that the company will allow their users to manipulate so that they recognize the company budget in addition to, or instead of, the VISA budget. She then distributes the new permissions records and budgets to her users. The audit data from these users is then reduced against the encumbrance on the company's VISA budget to produce a periodic billing.

In another example, a consumer wants to control his family's electronic appliance use of his VISA card, and prevent his children from playing too many video games, while allowing unlimited use of encyclopedias. In this case, he could create two budgets. The first budget can be aliased to his VISA card, and might only be used with encyclopedia objects (referenced to individual encyclopedia objects and/or to one or more classes of encyclopedia objects) that reference the aliased budget in their explicitly modified permissions record. The second budget could be, for example, a time budget that he redistributes to the family

for use with video game objects (video game class). In this instance, the second budget is a "self-replenishing" security/control budget, that allows, for example, two hours of use per day. The first budget operates in the same manner as the earlier example. The second budget is added as a new required method to permissions records for video games. Since the time budget is required to access the video games, an effective control path is introduced for requiring the second budget -- only permissions records modified to accept the family budget can be used by the children for video games and they are limited to two hours per day.

Sharing and Distributing Rights and Budgets

Move

The VDE "move" concept provided by the preferred embodiment covers the case of "friendly sharing" of rights and budgets. A typical case of "move" is a user who owns several machines and wishes to use the same objects on more than one of them. For example, a user owns a desktop and a notebook computer. They have a subscription to an electronic newspaper that they wish to read on either machine, i.e., the user wishes to move rights from one machine to the other.

An important concept within "move" is the idea of independent operation. Any electronic appliance 600 to which

rights have been moved may contact distributors or clearinghouses independently. For example, the user mentioned above may want to take their notebook on the road for an extended period of time, and contact clearinghouses and distributors without a local connection to their desktop.

To support independent operation, the user should be able to define an account with a distributor or clearinghouse that is independent of the electronic appliance 600 she is using to connect. The transactions must be independently traceable and reconcilable among and between machines for both the end user and the clearinghouse or distributor. The basic operations of moving rights, budgets, and bitmap or compound meters between machines is also supported.

Redistribution

Redistribution forms a UDE middle ground between the "friendly sharing" of "move," and formal distribution. Redistribution can be thought of as "anonymous distribution" in the sense that no special interaction is required between a creator, clearinghouse, or distributor and a redistributor. Of course, a creator or distributor does have the ability to limit or prevent redistribution.

Unlike the "move" concept, redistribution does not imply independent operation. The redistributor serves as one point of contact for users receiving redistributed rights and/or budgets, etc. These users have no knowledge of, or access to, the clearinghouse (or and/or distributor) accounts of the redistributor. The redistributor serves as an auditor for the rights and/or budgets, etc. that they redistribute, unless specifically overridden by restrictions from distributors and/or clearinghouses. Since redistributees (recipients of redistributed rights and/or budgets, etc.) would place a relatively unquantifiable workload on clearinghouses, and furthermore, since a redistributor would be placing himself at an auditable risk (responsible for all redistributed rights and/or budgets, etc.), the audit of rights, budgets, etc. of redistributees by redistributors is assumed as the default case in the preferred embodiment.

Distribution

Distribution involves three types of entity. Creators usually are the source of distribution. They typically set the control structure "context" and can control the rights which are passed into a distribution network. Distributors are users who form a link between object (content) end users and object (content) creators. They can provide a two-way conduit for rights and audit data. Clearinghouses may provide independent

financial services, such as credit and/or billing services, and can serve as distributors and/or creators. Through a permissions and budgeting process, these parties collectively can establish fine control over the type and extent of rights usage and/or auditing activities.

Encumbrance

An "encumbrance" is a special type of VDE budget. When that a budget distribution of any type occurs, an "encumbrance" may be generated. An encumbrance is indistinguishable from an original budget for right exercise (e.g., content usage payment) purposes, but is uniquely identified within distribution records as to the amount of the encumbrance, and all necessary information to complete a shipping record to track the whereabouts of an encumbrance. For right exercise purposes, an encumbrance is identical to an original budget; but for tracking purposes, it is uniquely identifiable.

In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, a Distribution Event ID will be used by user VDE nodes and by clearinghouse services to track and reconcile encumbrances, even in the case of asynchronous audits. That is, the "new" encumbrance budget is unique from a tracking point of view, but indistinguishable from a usage point of view.

Unresolved encumbrances are a good intermediate control for a VDE distribution process. A suitable "grace period" can be introduced during which encumbrances must be resolved. If this period elapses, an actual billing or payment may occur. However, even after the interval has expired and the billing and/or payment made, an encumbrance may still be outstanding and support later reconciliation. In this case, an auditor may allow a user to gain a credit, or a user may connect to a VDE node containing an encumbered budget, and resolve an amount as an internal credit. In some cases, missing audit trails may concern a distributor sufficiently to revoke redistribution privileges if encumbrances are not resolved within a "grace period," or if there are repeated grace period violations or if unresolved encumbrances are excessively large.

Encumbrances can be used across a wide variety of distribution modes. Encumbrances, when used in concert with aliasing of budgets, opens important additional distribution possibilities. In the case of aliasing a budget, the user places himself in the control path for an object -- an aliased budget may only be used in conjunction with permissions records that have been modified to recognize it. An encumbrance has no such restrictions.

For example, a user may want to restrict his children's use of his electronic, VDE node VISA budget. In this case, the user can generate an encumbrance on his VISA budget for the children's family alias budget, and another for his wife that is a transparent encumbrance of the original VISA budget. BigCo may use a similar mechanism to distribute VISA budget to department heads, and aliased BigCo budget to users directly.

Account Numbers and User IDs

In the preferred embodiment, to control access to clearinghouses, users are assigned account numbers at clearinghouses. Account numbers provide a unique "instance" value for a secure database record from the point of view of an outsider. From the point of view of an electronic appliance 600 site, the user, group, or group/user ids provide the unique instance of a record. For example, from the point of view of VISA, your Gold Card belongs to account number #123456789. From the point of view of the electronic appliance site (for example, a server at a corporation), the Gold card might belong to user id 1023. In organizations which have plural users and/or user groups using a VDE node, such users and/or user groups will likely be assigned unique user IDs. differing budgets and/or other user rights may be assigned to different users and/or user groups and/or other VDE control information may be applied on a differing manner to electronic content and/or appliance usage by

users assigned with different such IDs. Of course, both a clearinghouse and a local site will likely have both pieces of information, but "used data" versus the "comment data" may differ based on perspective.

In the preferred embodiment case of "move," an account number stored with rights stays the same. In the preferred embodiment of other forms of distribution, a new account number is required for a distributee. This may be generated automatically by the system, or correspond to a methodology developed by a distributor or redistributor. Distributors maintain account numbers (and associated access secrets) in their local name services for each distributee. Conversely, distributees' name services may store account numbers based on user id for each distributor. This record usually is moved with other records in the case of move, or is generated during other forms of distribution.

Organizations (including families) may automatically assign unique user IDs when creating control information (e.g., a budget) for a new user or user group.

Requirements Record

In order to establish the requirements, and potentially options, for exercising a right associated with a VDE content

container object before one or more required permissions records are received for that object, a requirements record may exist in the private header of such an object. This record will help the user establish what they have, and what they need from a distributor prior to forming a connection. If the requirements or possibilities for exercising a particular right have changed since such an object was published, a modified requirements record may be included in a container with an object (if available and allowed), or a new requirements record may be requested from a distributor before registration is initiated. Distributors may maintain "catalogs" online, and/or delivered to users, of collections of requirements records and/or descriptive information corresponding to objects for which they may have ability to obtain and/or grant rights to other users.

Passing an Audit

In the preferred embodiment of VDE there may be at least two types of auditing. In the case of budget distribution, billing records that reflect consumption of a budget generally need to be collected and processed. In the case of permissions distribution, usage data associated with an object are also frequently required.

In order to effect control over an object, a creator may establish the basic control information associated with an object.

This is done in the formulation of permissions, the distribution of various security, administrative and/or financial budgets, and the level of redistribution that is allowed, etc. Distributors (and redistributors) may further control this process within the rights, budgets, etc. (senior control information) they have received.

For example, an object creator may specify that additional required methods may be added freely to their permissions records, establish no budget for this activity, and allow unlimited redistribution of this right. As an alternative example, a creator may allow moving of usage rights by a distributor to half a dozen subdistributors, each of whom can distribute 10,000 copies, but with no redistribution rights being allowed to be allocated to subdistributors' (redistributors') customers. As another example, a creator may authorize the moving of usage rights to only 10 VDE nodes, and to only one level of distribution (no redistribution). Content providers and other contributors of control information have the ability through the use of permissions records and/or component assemblies to control rights other users are authorized to delegate in the permissions records they send to those users, so long as such right to control one, some, or all such rights of other users is either permitted or restricted (depending on the control information distribution model). It is possible and often desirable, using VDE, to construct a mixed model in which a distributor is restricted from

controlling certain rights of subsequent users and is allowed to control other rights. VDE control of rights distribution in some VDE models will in part or whole, at least for certain one or more "levels" of a distribution chain, be controlled by electronic content control information providers who are either not also providers of the related content or provide only a portion of the content controlled by said content control information. for example, in certain models, a clearinghouse might also serve as a rights distribution agent who provides one or more rights to certain value chain participants, which one or more rights may be "attached" to one or more rights to use the clearinghouse's credit (if said clearinghouse is, at least in part, a financial clearinghouse (such a control information provider may alternatively, or in addition, restrict other users' rights.

A content creator or other content control information provider may budget a user (such as a distributor) to create an unlimited number of permissions records for a content object, but revoke this right and/or other important usage rights through an expiration/termination process if the user does not report his usage (provide an audit report) at some expected one or more points in time and/or after a certain interval of time (and/or if the user fails to pay for his usage or violates other aspects of the agreement between the user and the content provider). This termination (or suspension or other specified consequence) can be

enforced, for example, by the expiration of time-aged encryption keys which were employed to encrypt one or more aspects of control information. This same termination (or other specified consequence such as budget reduction, price increase, message displays on screen to users, messages to administrators, etc.) can also be the consequence of the failure by a user or the users VDE installation to complete a monitored process, such as paying for usage in electronic currency, failure to perform backups of important stored information (e.g., content and/or appliance usage information, control information, etc.), failure to use a repeated failure to use the proper passwords or other identifiers, etc.).

Generally, the collection of audit information that is collected for reporting to a certain auditor can be enforced by expiration and/or other termination processes. For example, the user's VDE node may be instructed (a) from an external source to no longer perform certain tasks, (b) carries within its control structure information informing it to no longer perform certain tasks, or (c) is otherwise no longer able to perform certain tasks. The certain tasks might comprise one or more enabling operations due to a user's (or installation's) failure to either report said audit information to said auditor and/or receive back a secure confirmation of receipt and/or acceptance of said audit information. If an auditor fails to receive audit information from

a user (or some other event fails to occur or occur properly), one or more time-aged keys which are used, for example, as a security component of an embodiment of the present invention, may have their aging suddenly accelerated (completed) so that one or more processes related to said time-aged keys can no longer be performed.

Authorization Access Tags and Modification Access Tags

In order to enable a user VDE installation to pass audit information to a VDE auditing party such as a Clearinghouse, VDE allows a VDE auditing party to securely, electronically communicate with the user VDE installation and to query said installation for certain or all information stored within said installation's secure sub-system, depending on said auditing party's rights (said party shall normally be unable to access securely stored information that said party is not expressly authorized to access, that is one content provider will normally not be authorized to access content usage information related to content provided by a different content provider). The auditing party asserts a secure secret (e.g., a secure tag) that represents the set of rights of the auditor to access certain information maintained by said subsystem. If said subsystem validates said tag, the auditing party may then receive auditing information that it is allowed to request and receive.

Great flexibility exists in the enforcement of audit trail requirements. For example, a creator (or other content provider or control information provider or auditor in an object's or audit report's chain of handling) may allow changes by an auditor for event trails, but not allow anyone but themselves to read those trails, and limit the redistribution of this right to, for example, six levels. Alternatively, a creator or other controlling party may give a distributor the right to process, for example, 100,000 audit records (and/or, for example, the right to process 12 audit records from a given user) before reporting their usage. If a creator or other controlling party desires, he may allow (and/or require) separate (and containing different, a subset of, overlapping, or the same information) audit "packets" containing audit information, certain of said audit information to be processed by a distributor and certain other of said audit information to be passed back to the creator and/or other auditors (each receiving the same, overlapping, a subset of, or different audit information). Similarly, as long as allowed by, for example, an object creator, a distributor (or other content and/or control information provider) may require audit information to be passed back to it, for example, after every 50,000 audit records are processed (or any other unit of quantity and/or after a certain time interval and/or at a certain predetermined date) by a redistributor. In the preferred embodiment, audit rules, like other control structures, may be stipulated at any stage of a

distribution chain of handling as long as the right to stipulate said rules has not been restricted by a more "senior" object and/or control information distributing (such as an auditing) participant.

Audit information that is destined for different auditors may be encrypted by different one or more encryption keys which have been securely provided by each auditor's VDE node and communicated for inclusion in a user's permissions record(s) as a required step, for example, during object registration. This can provide additional security to further ensure (beyond the use of passwords and/or other identification information and other VDE security features) that an auditor may only access audit information to which he is authorized. In one embodiment, encrypted (and/or unencrypted) "packets" of audit information (for example, in the form of administrative objects) may be bound for different auditors including a clearinghouse and/or content providers and/or other audit information users (including, for example, market analysts and/or list purveyors). The information may pass successively through a single chain of handling, for example, user to clearinghouse to redistributor to distributor to publisher/object creator, as specified by VDE audit control structures and parameters. Alternatively, encrypted (or, normally less preferably, unencrypted) audit packets may be required to be dispersed directly from a user to a plurality of

auditors, some one or more who may have the responsibility to "pass along" audit packets to other auditors. In another embodiment, audit information may be passed, for example, to a clearinghouse, which may then redistribute all and/or appropriate subsets of said information (and/or some processed result) to one or more other parties, said redistribution employing VDE secure objects created by said clearinghouse.

An important function of an auditor (receiver of audit information) is to pass administrative events back to a user VDE node in acknowledgement that audit information has been received and/or "recognized." In the preferred embodiment, the receipt and/or acceptance of audit information may be followed by two processes. The first event will cause the audit data at a VDE node which prepared an audit report to be deleted, or compressed into, or added to, one or more summary values. The second event, or set of events, will "inform" the relevant security (for example, termination and/or other consequence) control information (for example, budgets) at said VDE node of the audit receipt, modify expiration dates, provide key updates, and/or etc. In most cases, these events will be sent immediately to a site after an audit trail is received. In some cases, this transmission may be delayed to, for example, first allow processing of the audit trail and/or payment by a user to an auditor or other party.

In the preferred embodiment, the administrative events for content objects and independently distributed methods/component assemblies are similar, but not necessarily identical. For example, key updates for a budget may control encryption of a billing trail, rather than decryption of object content. The billing trail for a budget is in all respects a method event trail. In one embodiment, this trail must include sufficient references into distribution records for encumbrances to allow reconciliation by a clearinghouse. This may occur, for example, if a grace period elapses and the creator of a budget allows unresolved encumbrances to ultimately yield automatic credits if an expired encumbrance is "returned" to the creator.

Delivery of audit reports through a path of handling may be in part insured by an inverse (return of information) audit method. Many VDE methods have at least two pieces: a portion that manages the process of producing audit information at a user's VDE node; and a portion that subsequently acts on audit data. In an example of the handling of audit information bound for a plurality of auditors, a single container object is received at a clearinghouse (or other auditor). This container may contain (a) certain encrypted audit information that is for the use of the clearinghouse itself, and (b) certain other encrypted audit information bound for other one or more auditor parties. The two sets of information may have the same, overlapping and in part

different, or entirely different, information content.

Alternatively, the clearinghouse VDE node may be able to work with some or all of the provided audit information. The audit information may be, in part, or whole, in some summary and/or analyzed form further processed at the clearinghouse and/or may be combined with other information to form a, at least in part, derived set of information and inserted into one or more at least in part secure VDE objects to be communicated to said one or more (further) auditor parties. When an audit information container is securely processed at said clearinghouse VDE node by said inverse (return) audit method, the clearinghouse VDE node can create one or more VDE administrative objects for securely carrying audit information to other auditors while separately processing the secure audit information that is specified for use by said clearinghouse. Secure audit processes and credit information distribution between VDE participants normally takes place within the secure VDE "black box," that is processes are securely processed within secure VDE PPE650 and audit information is securely communicated between the VDE secure subsystems of vDE participants employing VDE secure communication techniques (e.g., public key encryption, and authentication).

This type of inverse audit method may specify the handling of returned audit information, including, for example, the local

processing of audit information and/or the secure passing along of audit information to one or more auditor parties. If audit information is not passed to one or more other auditor parties as may be required and according to criteria that may have been set by said one or more other auditor parties and/or content providers and/or control information providers during a permissions record specification and/or modification process, the failure to, for example, receive notification of successful transfer of required audit information by an auditor party, e.g., a content provider, can result in the disablement of at least some capability of the passing through party's VDE node (for example, disablement of the ability to further perform certain one or more VDE managed business functions that are related to object(s) associated with said audit or party). In this preferred embodiment example, when an object is received by an auditor, it is automatically registered and permissions record(s) contents are entered into the secure management database of the auditor's VDE node.

One or more permissions records that manage the creation and use of an audit report object (and may manage other aspects of object use as well) may be received by a user's system during an audit information reporting exchange (or other electronic interaction between a user and an auditor or auditor agent). Each received permissions record may govern the creation of the

next audit report object. After the reporting of audit information, a new permissions record may be required at a user's VDE node to refresh the capability of managing audit report creation and audit information transfer for the next audit reporting cycle. In our above example, enabling an auditor to supply one or more permissions records to a user for the purpose of audit reporting may require that an auditor (such as a clearinghouse) has received certain, specified permissions records itself from "upstream" auditors (such as, for example, content and/or other content control information providers). Information provided by these upstream permissions records may be integrated into the one or more permissions records at an auditor VDE (e.g., clearinghouse) installation that manage the permissions record creation cycle for producing administrative objects containing permissions records that are bound for users during the audit information reporting exchange. If an upstream auditor fails to receive, and/or is unable to process, required audit information, this upstream auditor may fail to provide to the clearinghouse (in this example) the required permissions record information which enables a distributor to support the next permission record creation/auditing cycle for a given one or more objects (or class of objects). As a result, the clearinghouse's VDE node may be unable to produce the next cycle's permissions records for users, and/or perform some other important process. This VDE audit reporting control process may be entirely electronic process

management involving event driven VDE activities at both the intended audit information receiver and sender and employing both their secure PPE650 and secure VDE communication techniques.

In the preferred embodiment, each time a user registers a new object with her own VDE node, and/or alternatively, with a remote clearinghouse and/or distributor VDE node, one or more permissions records are provided to, at least in part, govern the use of said object. The permissions records may be provided dynamically during a secure UDE registration process (employing the VDE installation secure subsystem), and/or may be provided following an initial registration and received at some subsequent time, e.g. through one or more separate secure VDE communications, including, for example, the receipt of a physical arrangement containing or otherwise carrying said information. At least one process related to the providing of the one or more permissions records to a user can trigger a metering event which results in audit information being created reflecting the user's VDE node's, clearinghouse's, and/or distributor's permissions records provision process. This metering process may not only record that one or more permissions records have been created. It may also record the VDE node name, user name, associated object identification information, time, date, and/or other identification information. Some or all of this information can

become part of audit information securely reported by a clearinghouse or distributor, for example, to an auditing content creator and/or other content provider. This information can be reconciled by secure VDE applications software at a receiving auditor's site against a user's audit information passed through by said clearinghouse or distributor to said auditor. For each metered one or more permissions records (or set of records) that were created for a certain user (and/or VDE node) to manage use of certain one or more VDE object(s) and/or to manage the creation of VDE object audit reports, it may be desirable that an auditor receive corresponding audit information incorporated into an, at least in part, encrypted audit report. This combination of metering of the creation of permissions records; secure, encrypted audit information reporting processes; secure VDE subsystem reconciliation of metering information reflecting the creation of registration and/or audit reporting permissions with received audit report detail; and one or more secure VDE installation expiration and/or other termination and/or other consequence processes; taken together significantly enhances the integrity of the VDE secure audit reporting process as a trusted, efficient, commercial environment.

Secure Document Management Example

VDE 100 may be used to implement a secure document management environment. The following are some examples of how this can be accomplished.

In one example, suppose a law firm wants to use VDE 100 to manage documents. In this example, a law firm that is part of a litigation team might use VDE in the following ways:

1. to securely control access to, and/or other usage of, confidential client records,
2. to securely control access, distribution, and/or other rights to documents and memoranda created at the law firm,
3. to securely control access and other use of research materials associated with the case,
4. to securely control access and other use, including distribution of records, documents, and notes associated with the case,
5. to securely control how other firms in the litigation team may use, including change, briefs that have been distributed for comment and review,
6. to help manage client billing.

The law firm may also use VDE to electronically file briefs with the court (presuming the court is also VDE capable) including providing secure audit verification of the ID (e.g., digital signature) of filers and other information pertinent to said filing procedure.

In this example, the law firm receives in VDE content containers documents from their client's VDE installation secure subsystem(s). Alternatively, or in addition, the law firm may receive either physical documents which may be scanned into electronic form, and/or they receive electronic documents which have not yet been placed in VDE containers. The electronic form of a document is stored as a VDE container (object) associated with the specific client and/or case. The VDE container mechanism supports a hierarchical ordering scheme for organizing files and other information within a container; this mechanism may be used to organize the electronic copies of the documents within a container. A VDE container is associated with specific access control information and rights that are described in one or more permissions control information sets (PERCs) associated with that container. In this example, only those members of the law firm who possess a VDE instance, an appropriate PERC, and the VDE object that contains the desired document, may use the document. Alternatively or in addition, a law firm member may use a VDE instance which has been

installed on the law firm's network server. In this case, the member must be identified by an appropriate PERC and have access to the document containing VDE object (in order to use the server VDE installation). Basic access control to electronic documents is enabled using the secure subsystem of one or more user VDE installations.

VDE may be used to provide basic usage control in several ways. First, it permits the "embedding" of multiple containers within a single object. Embedded objects permit the "nesting" of control structures within a container. VDE also extends usage control information to an arbitrary granular level (as opposed to a file based level provided by traditional operating systems) and provides flexible control information over any action associated with the information which can be described as a VDE controlled process. For example, simple control information may be associated with viewing the one or more portions of documents and additional control information may be associated with editing, printing and copying the same and/or different one or more portions of these same documents.

In this example, a "client" container contains all documents that have been provided by the client (documents received in other containers can be securely extracted and embedded into the VDE client container using VDE extraction and embedding

capabilities). Each document in this example is stored as an object within the parent, client VDE container. The "client" container also has several other objects embedded within it; one for each attorney to store their client notes, one (or more) for research results and related information, and at least one for copies of letters, work papers, and briefs that have been created by the law firm. The client container may also contain other information about the client, including electronic records of billing, time, accounting, and payments. Embedding VDE objects within a parent VDE content container provides a convenient way to securely categorize and/or store different information that shares similar control information. All client provided documents may, for example, be subject to the same control structures related to use and non-disclosure. Attorney notes may be subject to control information, for example, their use may be limited to the attorney who created the notes and those attorneys to whom such creating attorney expressly grants access rights. Embedded containers also provide a convenient mechanism to control collections of dissimilar information. For example, the research object(s) may be stored in the form of (or were derived from) VDE "smart objects" that contain the results of research performed by that object. Research results related to one aspect of the case retrieved from a VDE enabled LEXIS site might be encapsulated as one smart object; the results of another session related to another (or the same) aspect of the case may be encapsulated as a

different object. Smart objects are used in this example to help show that completely disparate and separately delivered control information may be incorporated into a client container as desired and/or required to enforce the rights of providers (such as content owners).

Control structures may be employed to manage any variety of desired granularities and/or logical document content groupings; a document, page, paragraph, topically related materials, etc. In this example, the following assumptions are made: client provided documents are controlled at the page level, attorney notes are controlled at the document level on an attorney by attorney basis, court filings and briefs are controlled at a document level, research information is controlled at whatever level the content provider specifies at the time the research was performed, and certain highly confidential information located in various of the above content may be identified as subject to display and adding comments only, and only by the lead partner attorneys, with only the creator and/or embedder of a given piece of content having the right to be otherwise used (printed, extracted, distributed, etc).

In general, container content in this example is controlled with respect to distribution of rights. This control information are associated at a document level for all internally generated

documents, at a page level for client level documents, and at the level specified by the content provider for research documents.

VDE control information can be structured in either complex or simple structures, depending on the participant's desires. In some cases, a VDE creator will apply a series of control structure definitions that they prefer to use (and that are supported by the VDE application managing the specification of rules and control information, either directly, or through the use of certified application compatible VDE component assemblies.

In this example, the law firm sets up a standard VDE client content container for a new client at the time they accept the case. A law firm VDE administrator would establish a VDE group for the new client and add the VDE IDs of the attorneys at the firm that are authorized to work on the case, as well as provide, if appropriate, one or more user template applications. These templates provide, for example, one or more user interfaces and associated control structures for selection by users of additional and/or alternative control functions (if allowed by senior control information), entry of control parameter data, and/or performing user specific administrative tasks. The administrator uses a creation tool along with a predefined creation template to create the container. This creation template specifies the document usage (including distribution control

information) for documents as described above. Each electronic document from the client (including letters, memoranda, E-mail, spreadsheet, etc.) are then added to the container as separate embedded objects. Each new object is created using a creation template that satisfies that the default control structures specified with the container as required for each new object of a given type.

As each attorney works on the case, they may enter notes into an object stored within the client's VDE container. These notes may be taken using a VDE aware word processor already in use at the law firm. In this example, a VDE redirector handles the secure mapping of the word processor file requests into the VDE container and its objects through the use of VDE control processes operating with one or more VDE PPEs. Attorney note objects are created using the default creation template for the document type with assistance from the attorney if the type cannot be automatically determined from the content. This permits VDE to automatically detect and protect the notes at the predetermined level, e.g. document, page, paragraph.

Research can be automatically managed using VDE. Smart objects can be, used to securely search out, pay for if necessary, and retrieve information from VDE enabled information resources on the information highway.

Examples of such resources might include LEXIS, Westlaw, and other related legal databases. Once the information is retrieved, it may be securely embedded in the VDE content client container. If the smart object still contains unreleased information, the entire smart object may be embedded in the client's VDE container. This places the unreleased information under double VDE control requirements: those associated with releasing the information from smart object (such as payment and/or auditing requirements) and those associated with access to, or other usage of, client information of the specified type.

Briefs and other filings may be controlled in a manner similar to that for attorney notes. The filings may be edited using the standard word processors in the law firm; with usage control structures controlling who may review, change, and/or add to the document (or, in a more sophisticated example, a certain portion of said document). VDE may also support electronic filing of briefs by providing a trusted source for time/date stamping and validation of filed documents.

When the client and attorney want to exchange confidential information over electronic mail or other means, VDE can play an important role in ensuring that information exchanged under privilege, properly controlled, and not

inappropriately released and/or otherwise used. The materials (content) stored in a VDE content container object will normally be encrypted. Thus wrapped, a VDE object may be distributed to the recipient without fear of unauthorized access and/or other use. The one or more authorized users who have received an object are the only parties who may open that object and view and/or manipulate and/or otherwise modify its contents and VDE secure auditing ensures a record of all such user content activities. VDE also permits the revocation of rights to use client/attorney privileged information if such action becomes necessary, for example, after an administrator review of user usage audit information.

Large Organization Example

In a somewhat more general example, suppose an organization (e.g., a corporation or government department) with thousands of employees and numerous offices disposed throughout a large geographic area wishes to exercise control over distribution of information which belongs to said organization (or association). This information may take the form of formal documents, electronic mail messages, text files, multimedia files, etc., which collectively are referred to as "documents."

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